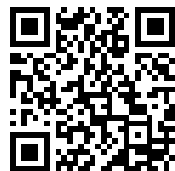

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FATE'S MYSTERIES

Cleveland.



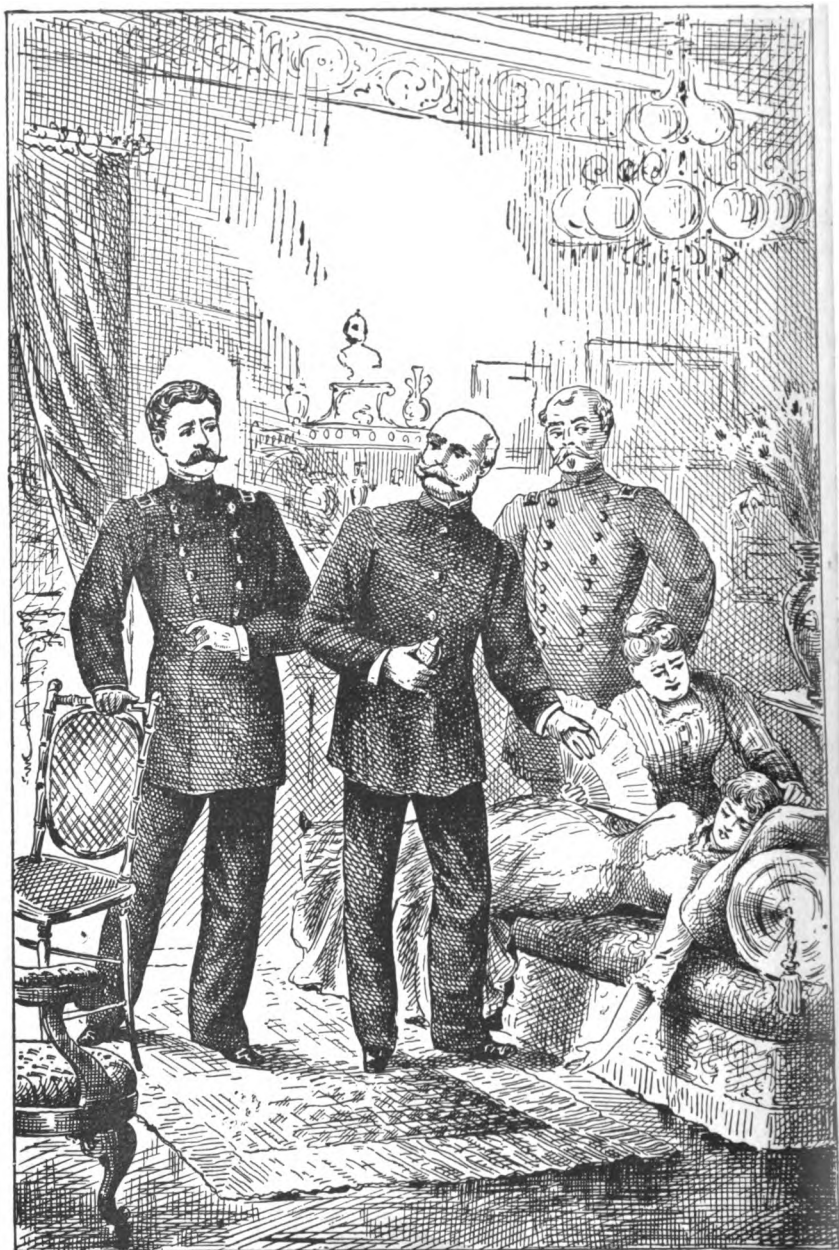


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"This is not a case of fainting, sir!" (Page 20.)

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HIS HONOR;

OR,

FATE'S MYSTERIES.

A THRILLING REALISTIC STORY

OF THE

UNITED STATES ARMY.

BY

CYNTHIA E. CLEVELAND,

Author of "See-Saw."

NEW YORK:

THE TRADE SUPPLIED BY
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1889.

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Dedication.

TO THE MEMORY OF MY SAINTED MOTHER,
WHOSE EARLY LESSONS
HAVE INSPIRED MY PEN TO WRITE OF
LIFE'S MYSTERIES AND DUTIES,
THIS BOOK IS LOVINGLY INSCRIBED.

CYNTHIA E. CLEVELAND.

HIS HONOR;

OR,

FATE'S MYSTERIES.

CHAPTER I.

ON the evening of the day on which I arrived in Washington from Fort Deering, my friend Martin and I were walking leisurely down Connecticut Avenue, when suddenly my footsteps were arrested by some unaccountable power which said, or rather forced me to say abruptly, "You must excuse me, Martin, I am obliged to return. Please present my regrets to Hal. I will see him at some other time;" and, regardless of my friend's look of blank amazement, I hurriedly retraced my steps, knowing not why or wherefore, but feeling that the influence which impelled me in this direction could emanate from but one source.

Could she be ill? Was she in danger? Did she need me? I felt the perspiration standing in great beads upon my forehead as the idea of peril to her suggested itself to my mind.

I had been walking very rapidly since I left Martin, and now the sound of voices attracted my attention. I realized that I was not the only pedestrian in this vicinity.

The next instant I seemed to stand stone-still, — I suppose I did not stop at all, — and felt that every separate drop of blood in my veins was slowly turning to ice, as I recognized a never-to-be-forgotten voice which was saying, —

“I am sure you deserve it,” — here I lost a few words, then, — “but I will talk with father.”

I was so near her living presence that with one stride I could have touched her garments. In the next instant I realized that her escort was a tall man, whose back and shoulders, even in civilian’s dress, bore the unmistakable signs of soldierly training. His manner towards the lady was that of extreme deference, and his voice had a tender intonation that to my strained nerves indicated the pleading lover.

The conversation became more earnest. Great God ! what is that I hear ?

“If the decision is not favorable, Miss Percival, all my future will be a blank.” His voice trembled, as if swayed by a great and all-absorbing passion.

I felt that I was reeling, but, with a vigorous effort, gained my self-possession, only to hear that voice of infinite sweetness, which I had once known so well, in kind and gentle reply, but in tones so low that I could not understand a word.

Like an enraged lion I thought to pounce upon and destroy him, — to seize him by the throat, and strangle him upon the spot. I could have killed him in that moment of madness.

Before I could act upon the impulse, her familiar voice, as in times past, touched the better nature

within me and calmed my perturbed spirit, like a breath of cool air upon the heat of a summer noon.

I crossed the street to avoid the possibility of hearing more. I wished that I had gone with Martin. I thought I would return to the Ebbitt, but I was as powerless to go further from Marion as the steel to resist the magnet.

Then a strange feeling came over me, as if we three were alone in the world, and Marion was lost to me; worse than that, I was chained to the spot, and compelled to see her, making the sunshine of another's life with a largess of a love which was mine, mine, and fool, idiot, that I had been, had allowed to drift from me.

They had neared her own door. Crossing the street to enter, brought them again very near me. I fancied that she leaned trustingly on his arm, as she once had leaned on mine. "God help me!" thought I. "Is she lost to me forever?" Then came further torture, for he said earnestly, —

"You will write to me?"

She replied to his questioning voice with a bend of her head, as I could see by the gas-light from the open door.

I heard her invite him in, and his response, "No, thank you, not to-night!" Then I fancied that she gave him the same appealing look of disappointment, which was once so irresistible to me, when other duties interfered with her plans for our pleasure. Again she seemed to plead:

"Cousin Elinor would like to see you, Leo. Come in a moment."

They went within. I stood without, with a multitude of conflicting emotions that for a time rendered my thoughts devoid of intelligent action. After a moment, I said to myself, —

"The name Leo sounds strangely familiar, but it cannot be Leo Winchester! Marion Percival could not receive him. Impossible!

"Whoever he may be," I soliloquized, "she called him Leo. She never called me Hugh!"

A pang of jealousy seized me as I thought of the stately courtesy with which she used to address me. Had two years so transformed her that she could so soon listen to other protestations of love?

How strange it is that, however unfaithful we may be ourselves, we always expect those who have loved us to be true!

I was miserable, and asked myself despairingly, "Has it come to this? With all my recent dreams of bliss, with all my cherished hopes of happiness at last, must I realize that it has all been an *ignis fatuus* to lure me on to this moment of utter disappointment and despair?"

I started. The door had opened again. I heard her say, "I am sorry Cousin Elinor is out. She will regret not seeing you."

The next moment I stood face to face with the former lieutenant of the —th Infantry, Leopold Winchester.

"By G—d, Winchester!" I said, starting forward; "has the military code reached such a point of decadence in Washington that Marion Percival, the daughter of a military gentleman, will receive *you*?"

I would have said more, but he gave me a look of supreme contempt, and in disdainful silence went on his way. This was paralyzing.

"What can such treatment mean? Can it be possible that he considers himself as good as accepted? I deserve no better fate than this, but I will not bear it. She shall not marry him!" I ejaculated, with clinched fist; for at that moment I felt that I could cheerfully see her married to another if it must be, but to Leopold Winchester, never!"

"I must know the worst," I said, "rather anything than this," and scarcely knowing what I did, I ascended the familiar stone steps and rang the door-bell vigorously.

I had but a moment in which to regain command of myself, before I was admitted, and ushered into the well-remembered parlor.

Marion's elegant figure and stately carriage were always sufficiently distinguished to elicit universal admiration; but as she entered the parlor this evening in the plain walking suit which she had not had time to remove, she looked unusually attractive; for something either exciting or exhilarating had sent the warm blood to her naturally pale cheek, and given it just the flush of color which it needed to make her look youthful and beautiful. For Marion was not a young girl, dear reader, but a mature woman, with a woman's heart and life.

In my overwrought state of mind, my first thought as her charming face greeted my eyes was that Winchester had inspired the rich glow on her cheek, and my heart sank within me. I was too much disturbed

to recall for the moment that my presence had always brought the color to the face I loved, in those happy by-gone days.

She met me with a smile, and said, "This is indeed a pleasant surprise, Colonel Atherton," and extended her hand with great cordiality.

"I have arrived in Washington only to-day," I said, "and am making my first call upon you."

As I remembered how near I had been to making my call elsewhere, I could feel the blood mount to my brow, for her clear eyes always seemed to see through every prevarication and subterfuge, and they were reading my face at this moment.

I strove to speak again, but words failed me, and she, woman-like, came to the rescue with a supreme effort for self-control which was marvellous.

"I did not know that you were expected," said she. "I supposed you still in the West."

Her voice had hardly a perceptible tremor, although she must have been taken very much by surprise. Seeing her calmness would ordinarily have restored my own faculties, but I was beside myself with jealousy of my despised and hated rival, and scarcely knowing what I said, exclaimed,—

"I have come none too soon, judging from what I have just witnessed,—I could not help hearing your conversation with Mr. Winchester."

She looked startled, but made no reply, and I continued, "He shall not make your life as wretched as he has rendered a portion of mine."

"Colonel Atherton, what do you mean?" she said quickly.

Unheeding her question I went on :

"By my rights in the past, I protest!"

"Colonel," she said, "I cannot comprehend you. To what rights can you refer, and against what do you protest?"

"The right, Marion, of a heart which beats for you only; the right of a love I cannot repress. True love is immortal, and my love for you was the true love of my life."

Her large blue eyes grew dark with suppressed excitement, but she haughtily replied, —

"Since you yourself, sir, forfeited those rights, I now consider your language and your manner very ill-timed."

"Marion, I beg you to let that pass without discussion for the present, and to believe me when I say that I have never ceased to love you."

I moved towards her. She did not seem to notice me, but stood with her hands tightly clasped, as if to crush all show of feeling; but she replied, or rather ejaculated, —

"Colonel Atherton, I thought you had gone out of my life."

Then with a dazed expression she suddenly pressed one hand to her head, while she extended the other, palm outward, as if to repel my advance, and in the same far-away tone asked, —

"Is this true, or am I dreaming again?"

"Marion! Miss Percival," I said, for she had suddenly assumed a manner of such impenetrable dignity that it seemed as if she had put illimitable space between us; "it is indeed true. I am here with a

burdened soul and a sadly repentant heart. I must speak to you," I continued, for she had turned her head away from me. "I cannot permit you to think that I am so dishonest as I appear. I have never known one moment's peace of mind since by my own act I lost you. I have longed for your presence as no other man ever before longed for that of the woman he loved."

"Colonel Atherton!" she interrupted, "it is unmanly in you to address me in such language, and unwomanly in me to listen."

"No, no, Marion, do not say that!" I interrupted, while my voice trembled and my heart shrank from the thought that she considered herself pledged to another; "do not say that there is no hope when the love-rent soul of man pleads with the soul of the woman he loves!" Again her white hand was raised, and with deepening color she said sharply, —

"Hush, hush, I entreat you!"

Pleadingly I persisted:

"Marion, listen patiently this once! Can you not forgive the great wrong I did you, for the sake of its cruel expiation?"

She listened to me, but did not speak, and I could read no answer in her flushed cheeks and averted eyes. The silence was more than I could endure.

"Marion," I said, "can you doubt my love?"

Her usual self-control seemed to desert her as she strove for utterance; but with a powerful effort she choked back the rising sob and replied, —

"Idle as all this is now, I am only just, when I say I have never doubted that you loved me; but I am

equally positive now that you fall in love with every attractive woman you meet who has any magnetic influence upon you. How could I trust you, even — even if it were right?”

Her look of love, of mute appeal, of longing to place her hand in mine, yet doubt of my truth, unmanned me. I was overwhelmed; my eyes fell; I could not look her in the face. It seemed to me that every drop of blood in my veins tingled with shame. I would have liked the earth to open, take me in, and hide me forever from the sight of the woman at whose feet I could have fallen down and worshipped, but for my humiliating sense of utter unworthiness. The dead silence was insupportable. I felt that I must speak, but language failed me. I would at least speak her name, but every effort was futile. My heart seemed to come into my mouth and choke me. My whole life seemed spread out like a panorama before me, in sight of the woman I loved, as a living witness against me. I thought to flee from her presence, but when I attempted to rise I could not move.

She, to whom power seemed to have been given by some mysterious influence to read me through and through, saw my confusion, and with Christ-like compassion, and the voice of an angel, it seemed to me then, said, —

“There can be no ground for personal humiliation in a law or a condition which you did not make. I believe this is a constitutional susceptibility for which you are not responsible, and which you are

powerless to control if you rely upon your own strength to do so."

Her look, her voice, awoke my paralyzed senses to life again, as I said in a trembling tone, —

"You cannot know how you humble me. What gives you such power to penetrate the inmost recesses of my being? Can you tell me?"

"Ah!" she exclaimed, "the same incomprehensible, mysterious power, which upon your entrance to the parlor you termed the immortality of love, which has made me suffer when you have sinned, and made me feel, with a continent intervening, every pivotal thing that has transpired with you bearing any relation to us since we last parted."

The doorbell rang at this juncture, and Marion arose as she heard the excited, terrified voice of little Jimmie Weeks in the hall. She stepped to the door, and he exclaimed, —

"Miss Marion, mamma says Bessie Brooks is dying, and she wants you to come at once!"

There could be no alternative, Marion must go. She raised her dark-blue eyes to mine, full of sadness, sorrow, and disappointment, and said, —

"I cannot refuse to answer a call like that. I am sorry to interrupt your call, but there is no help for it. I watched there last night, and we thought her better this morning; if there is a change for the worse there is probably no further hope."

"Do not let me detain you," I said "I have very much to say, but you cannot listen now. With your permission I will walk with you to your friend's door."

We were soon on our way, Marion quietly walking by my side, and I inwardly chafing over the unexpected interruption of our interview. At last I said testily, —

"I should think you were taking a great deal upon yourself in addition to all you have to do. Do you not know that one pair of shoulders, though ever so strong, cannot carry the whole world?"

"I have no ambition to emulate Atlas," she answered with a smile, "but this is an exceptional case, and I should feel guilty not to respond to their call. I cannot help doing all that is possible."

"You always seem to think that about everything you do. Who will do this for you when you begin to wear out?"

She laughed lightly, and said, —

"'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.' I will not idly rust in the mean time; but this case is of peculiar interest to me. When I came here, this Mrs. Brooks was boarding in the next street. She had this child Bessie with her, while two younger children were with their grandmother in Maryland. Mrs. Brooks had come to Washington to secure departmental employment under the new administration, sewing, in the mean time, to support herself and her child."

"How did you make her acquaintance?" said I.

"I had just received a dress from the West, which I had left with a real artiste to be embroidered. The artiste was not a dressmaker, so the dress was not completed when it reached me. I decided that it was just the thing for the inaugural ball if I could

find a dressmaker, and upon inquiry, Mrs. Brooks was recommended."

I saw how it was at once, and said quickly, —

"Is it possible that you feel called upon to carry on your heart all the sorrows of all the people with whom you may chance to have business relations?"

"Ah, no, not quite. I do not bear others' sorrows as I once did, though I do what I can to relieve those that come within my circle of acquaintance. I found Mrs. Brooks a refined, delicate Southern woman, —"

"And got to the bottom of her heart, and learned at once, I suppose, all her needs, promising to do all you could to bring about the accomplishment of her wishes," I interrupted.

"It was not quite so sudden as that," she said. "There were some Santa Fé people in the house whom I knew and who knew Mrs. Brooks. Through them I learned that her physician had told her that she must give up sewing or become a helpless invalid. One day soon after the inauguration she fell in a dead faint in her room, and a few days after little Bessie had a similar experience. Upon investigation it was found to be the result of sewer-gas. The mother was nearly frantic with fright, and I invited them home with me temporarily."

"Just what might have been expected of you!" I said. I knew it was not exactly kind, but I could not resist the feeling that she had no right to sacrifice herself so constantly for others.

"I could do nothing less," she said, with a reproachful look.

"What claims had they upon you?" I interrogated with asperity.

"Every claim," she replied; "the claim of a common humanity, the claims of helpless childhood and dependent widowhood, the claim of sickness upon health, of the weak upon the strong."

She spoke with a depth of feeling which made me ashamed of my selfish petulance, and I asked, —

"Well, what became of them then?"

"They soon found another boarding-house, of course, but they have seen very hard times, although Mrs. Brooks has tried in every honest way to support herself and her child. I have not time to tell you much more about them, but I have known the two to live for days on what fifteen cents would buy —"

"And you did not feel called upon to supply their needs?" I interrupted; "really I am astonished!"

She gave me a puzzled, inquiring look, and I quickly and repentantly added, —

"I know I have no right to say these things, but I do not like your making such a slave of yourself for others."

To which she answered, "It is much pleasanter being a slave for those we love or believe in than to work always for one's self; but I did not know this woman's needs till later. If Bessie Brooks dies, it will be from having suffered for the necessities of life, and all this can be charged to the personal account of that Congressman who thought nothing of violating a pledge given to a woman while he wanted the votes of her friends, but, his own position at-

tained, forgot her and repudiated his promise of assistance and influence."

We had now reached the door, and as Marion extended her hand in parting, she said, —

"Come again soon. I am sorry for this evening's disappointment."

She entered the house of death, and I turned away vexed, thwarted, and perplexed by all the events of this unsatisfactory evening.

CHAPTER II.

TWO years before this story opens, a singular circumstance occurred at Fort Deering. Lieutenant Winchester, of the —th Infantry, at this time stationed at Fort Deering, was in my parlor, engaged in conversation, as we supposed, with my ward, Ethel Grey, when suddenly the house was alarmed with the announcement that "Miss Ethel was in a dead faint."

I was immediately summoned from headquarters, and the lieutenant hastened to call the surgeon. Ethel remained wholly unconscious for several minutes, and had hardly regained consciousness when Dr. Ranney arrived.

He felt her pulse, and looked inquiringly first at the mother, then at me.

"Has she been subject to spells like this?" he asked in a low voice.

"No," Mrs. Grey replied; "she has always been extremely delicate, but never ill."

"Has she been frightened or excited? How did this occur?"

Mrs. Grey looked inquiringly at Lieutenant Winchester, who stood near a window across the room; and the doctor's eyes were directed towards him as they followed Mrs. Grey's glance.

"Were you with her?" he questioned sharply and quickly.

The young man came forward hesitatingly, and answered slowly, as if every word was being dragged from him by slow torture.

"Yes, — I was talking with her when she fainted suddenly, and if I had not caught her she would have fallen."

"This is not a case of fainting," said the doctor; "it seems to be a weak action of the heart, though I can see no indication of organic trouble;" then turning to Mrs. Grey he asked, —

"Has there ever been any heart disease in the family?"

"Not that I know of, doctor, but her father died suddenly in just this way. They called it apoplexy then."

"H'm!" said Dr. Ranney. "Yes, yes! Give her this, and take the pillow from under her head. Her youth is in her favor, but she must be kept perfectly quiet. She must not be questioned, or permitted to talk of what has occurred. Ignore it altogether. She has simply been ill, and must keep quiet until she is well again."

The doctor sat quietly for a few moments, counting the irregular beats in the delicate wrist, then rising, he turned to her mother, and said. —

"Every one about her must be cheerful when she rallies from this extreme prostration, and try to amuse quietly without exciting her. She will come out of this, do not fear," he added, as Mrs. Grey's troubled eyes rested on him.

The lieutenant had, unnoticed by any of us, with-

drawn, and we were all too anxious about Ethel to give him any further thought.

I learned afterwards from Mrs. Grey that she had felt instinctively, as I had, that Winchester's perturbed manner was more than the nervous excitement incident to fright; that his face bore unmistakable evidence of guilt, and he seemed more like a criminal trying to put distance between him and his crime, than like handsome Lieutenant Winchester, the pride of his regiment, and the admired of all feminine hearts.

It was midnight when I looked in upon Mrs. Grey, and her daughter for the last time before retiring. Ethel was sleeping sweetly, and we hoped that the morning would find her quite restored.

If ever one man felt an inexplicable hatred towards another, I did that night towards Lieutenant Winchester.

What could it have been that had stricken her so suddenly? What could have occurred between them to bring about such dire results for her?

Great God! I dared not think. I would to-morrow demand an explanation. If he refused, I would face him with my worst suspicions, and if the interview confirmed them, I would demand his immediate resignation. Her wrongs should be avenged.

Ethel's father was first lieutenant of B Company, —th Cavalry, when I was its captain, and a love had grown up between us then as strong and enduring as that of brothers. This feeling had never grown cold, although subsequent promotions had separated us, sending each to distant posts. When he died

suddenly, I was notified, and hastened to bestow my sympathy on the family of my old comrade.

I found that he had long been aware of the precarious condition of his health, and had made me the executor of his estate and the guardian of his child.

The least I could do for the memory of my dearest friend was to guard the interests of his loved ones as sacredly as I would if they were my own.

Thinking and planning thus for the morrow, I fell asleep. And the morrow came.

I learned this a full half-hour after my usual time to arise by a tapping at my door, and the announcement that it was half-past eight o'clock, and Major Follet was waiting below to see me. Dressing hastily I descended the stairs with a strong presentiment that some trouble was brewing. I was not sufficiently refreshed by my night's sleep to feel or look cheerful.

Follet's face was lowering and dark as a thunder-cloud.

"Good-morning, Follet !" I said. "What is the matter ?"

"I came on purpose to tell you, colonel," he answered, still with the same gloomy expression on his face.

I saw that something was wrong, but said cheerfully, —

"Come into the dining-room, and we can talk it over at the breakfast table."

"I beg pardon, colonel, but I cannot ; I must go back before guard-mount ; besides, I cannot discuss

this matter before witnesses. There are too many persons involved in it, too many complications at present. It is pretty thoroughly known at the post, and the most extraordinary speculations are being indulged in, — in short, it is already a general topic of conversation."

The major's face wore such a woe-begone expression by this time that I exclaimed impatiently, —

"In God's name, who is involved?"

"Well, sir," answered he, controlling his voice with difficulty, "two officers of the garrison; and one of them an esteemed personal friend of yours and mine. They have placed themselves in the most inexplicably compromising position, and cannot, or will not, explain."

"Who are they?" I asked.

"Lieutenants Howland and Winchester, sir."

I knew that all personal feeling must be laid aside, and only my official position could be considered. I had heard nothing from the sick-room since last night, and consequently had nothing more from that direction to intensify my feelings towards Winchester; so I said, as quietly as possible, —

"What is the nature of their offence? They have been into town, I presume, to begin with?"

"Yes, sir, and both have been drinking."

"That certainly is unfortunate, and, what is more, unusual, as neither of them is addicted to that habit."

"That is the smallest count against them," said the major ruefully; "they drifted into the Casino, and Winchester, who, they tell me, seemed strange

before he began to drink, became a raving maniac after, and attempted to fire promiscuously on the crowd. He was prevented from injuring some one only by the intervention of the police. When they came back he tried to fire on me, but Howland, who had become comparatively sober by that time, helped me to get him to his quarters."

"Well?" I said, still more impatiently, as the major hesitated.

"The whole thing is in the morning paper, sir, with this addition, that the young men indulged in scandalous jests, associated with the names of certain prominent ladies at the post."

"Shocking! damnably shocking!" I ejaculated, for I was filled with the worst apprehensions; "nothing can be worse than that, major. Of course they must be put under arrest, and I will be over right after breakfast."

As the major turned away I heard him say to himself, "What would he say if he knew all!" Then turning his troubled face towards me, he took two or three steps in my direction as if to speak again, but changing his purpose, turned quickly on his heel, and saying, "No, by Heaven, I cannot," ran rapidly down the steps.

Lieutenant Leopold Winchester was the son of Colonel James Winchester, now deceased. The colonel and I graduated in the same West Point class and were bosom friends. He received an appointment immediately after his graduation, and married the beautiful daughter of a prominent Virginia gentleman, soon after which he joined his

regiment. He distinguished himself for bravery on our Western frontier, when the wild savages rendered themselves a terror to the hardy pioneer, and had gradually risen by meritorious conduct to the rank of colonel.

At his death he left a widow and two children. Leopold was his mother's idol, while Amelia had always been her father's pet and pride. Aside from a small life insurance, which secured them a home, their only inheritance was an untarnished name.

The friends of Colonel Winchester had procured an appointment for the son in the army, and he, by good behavior and unswerving devotion to duty, had risen to the rank of first lieutenant, standing first in a list of ten on the files for promotion.

Lieutenant Winchester had inherited all the pride of his maternal ancestry, with their refined tastes, and was not the man to seek vicious associations deliberately, though he was always everywhere welcome. His tall, manly figure was conspicuous in any assemblage, as he stood six feet in height, and his dignified bearing made him look still taller. Quick witted, jovial, and courteous, he was considered an acquisition to any circle.

In view of these facts, it is not strange that Lieutenant Winchester had won his way to my heart, and to a welcome in my home at all times.

It was with mingled feelings of pain, regret, and serious apprehension that I left home that morning to face — I knew not what.

CHAPTER III.

WITH compressed lips I walked rapidly to my hotel, thinking of this strange conversation, — not in relation to the dying child, but of Marion's charges against myself.

I stepped into the office of the hotel, — a group of men were talking politics on one side ; another group sitting with chairs tipped back, in an atmosphere of smoke which came from choice cigars, were intently listening to a narrative of the thrilling personal adventures of a frontiersman, who was a gentleman of some pretensions to position and influence in his own home. I tried to listen to a discussion of the tariff, between two able men of different opinions, and, judging from their arguments, of nearly the same mental calibre ; — but it was useless, — their talk seemed mere jargon. I felt out of place, and all the surroundings seemed repugnant to me.

Then I sought my own room. Lying on the table were several unopened letters, but I had no heart to read them. I took up a home paper and turned to the column of personals, but everything seemed to mock me. I was a mockery to myself.

"This will not do," I said, and taking my hat I once more went out on the street, and began a brisk and aimless walk out Vermont Avenue. On — on I went, nothing arresting my attention, until I came

upon the street sweepers, when a something in the noise of the huge brush as it dragged its way along the pavement, interrupted my chaotic thinking, and I halted, asking myself, —

“Where am I going, and wherefore, at this time of night?” I was then near the street on which Mrs. Brooks lived.

“Why have I come in this direction,” I said impatiently; but I could not turn back, and the nearer I approached, the more calm I became, till at last I stood opposite the house. I gazed at the door. The dimly lighted gas-jet in the hall sent forth a rosy light, the reflection of a claret-colored globe.

Mrs. Brooks occupied the front room of the second floor, Marion had told me. All was silent as the night there. The window shades were down, and now and then a shadow flitted past, dimly outlined against the shade. Then the same shadow returned as though the room had been traversed to procure something from the opposite side of the room with which to relieve the suffering child.

A passer by, had there chanced to be one, which to my great relief there was not, might have suspected from my demeanor that I felt a deep interest (pity or sympathy) for the child who was hovering between earth and heaven; but, gracious reader, this child had no part in my thoughts that night. It was she who kept vigil there, whose words had been the cause of my unrest, and who seemed to be gifted with some power to calm my troubled spirit upon my near approach to her living presence.

It was this which held me spell-bound in the street

every time that I reached the spot directly opposite Mrs. Brooks' house, in my ceaseless tramp that weary night.

When I first left the house I tried earnestly to solve the puzzle of Marion's manner. I thought, "Once she made me the proudest man living by the bestowal of a love and trust second only to her faith in God ; but to-night," I said to myself, as I thought of the complicated circumstances of my position, "she misjudges and distrusts me, through a chain of circumstantial evidence, in face of which no woman could hold me blameless."

"Could I but explain to her the mystery in which my sudden and inexplicable marriage was involved, her true soul could not resist my unchanged love."

"If she could only know all, her great and generous heart would beat kindly even for poor broken-hearted Ethel ; but it cannot be. It is not for me to divulge the secrets of the sainted dead ; were I guilty of that dishonor then indeed would she have reason to despise me. I see no way through the labyrinth of my false position."

When I tried to analyze her statements, item by item, she said my "words were all idle now," emphasizing the *now*. Then I wondered if Winchester had prejudiced her against me to further his own suit. Had he won her? Then I had lost her forever. Reason seemed to leave me and I felt for an instant that I could kill the man who seemed destined to ruin my life.

My mood changed, and I began to seek for reasons why she should seem to blush for shame as I pleaded

with her for her love, as though my addresses were an insult to her. She always knew that I did not claim to be a Christian, that I was a man of the world, — I told her this myself.

I had never sought to sail into the harbor of her affections under false colors, and never claimed to be immaculate; but held myself to be an honorable man.

"How can I prove this to her, —" I said aloud, "while I cannot explain the past!"

I was interrupted in my reverie by a thrilling sound. It was only the midnight bell tolling from its high tower, but it was no messenger of peace to me; Marion's words would ring in my ears every time I tried to turn my steps away from her vicinity:

"You fall in love with every attractive woman you meet who has any magnetic influence upon you."

Reader, think you my self-love did not suffer untold agonies that night, — burning with a shame I could not banish, compelled to acknowledge to myself a truth I would rather have died to bury, than to admit to the world.

Was I then the abject slave of such an unusual susceptibility, constitutional though it was, which had once nearly shipwrecked my life? But how could she know of that experience?

It seemed to me in my solitary tramp that night in the silver moonlight, that Marion must know in some way everything I had ever thought or dreamed.

"Am I really different from other men?" I asked myself. Can I own even to myself that my moral nature is the slave of inherited tendencies, and

beyond my own control? No, a thousand times no!" I said with set teeth and indrawn breath. "I would rather the whole world should believe me an unmitigated scoundrel," I continued to myself, as I walked on, "deliberate sin may be atoned for by repentance and return to right living, but is there any expiation in this world for this kind of deformity? None."

Could I make such a plea as an apology for my actions? It would be too effeminate. I should be the laughing stock of my friends."

I heard myself laugh sardonically as I said aloud, —

"I should be accused of playing the 'baby act';" the very thought made me look down on myself with a sort of fear that I should find that I had in reality turned into a veritable rag-baby.

What in all this great world of ours, what indeed, is like a man's pride in his physical manhood? All else sinks into insignificance when weighed in the balance with this!

Then in my walk I seemed to hear her compassionate voice saying, —

"There is no cause for personal humiliation in a law or a condition which you did not make."

That was very comforting while she was saying it, but when away from her influence back in the world, it would matter little that she thought I was not the responsible party. The world would never give any credence to such a proposition, and if it did, it would only call forth such pity as it would give a deformed child, instead of sympathy for the man.

Existence in such circumstances would be unendurable.

What though I could shift the accountability upon the shoulders of my progenitors, who were ignorant of the laws of life, I would seem no less a contemptible coward.

Just at this time I returned again to the spot opposite Mrs. Brooks' apartments. I looked to see Marion's shadow on the curtain once more, but there was no sign of life. My train of thought was broken, my heated brain relieved of the dull dead weight which had oppressed it.

As I walked away again I said, —

"And she divined all this and still loved me! What can there be in me to inspire love in such a woman? Has she suffered when I have sinned, and felt all that has happened with me while absent?"

What a cyclone of regretful reminiscences the very thought brought back to me, as I recollected all the unjustifiable use I had made of my military position to clear out of my track every one who stood in the way of my selfish purposes.

"Can her statement be true," I soliloquized; "can she have suffered all this must imply, and still be able to love such a veritable villain as I permitted myself to be? Well might the poet say, —

" ' Ah, who but God alone
Can explain the everlasting mysteries of love? ' "

"But what have I to hope in the face of all this?" I asked. "Possibly everything. There is no accounting for the peculiar reasoning of a woman who

does her own thinking. Conventional opinions will have little weight with her on the grounds of conventionality, if they do not impress her with motives of conviction."

Then the question repeated itself, "Can I hope?"

Possibly not. The thought seemed paralyzing. "I cannot give her up," I said; "she alone can save me from utter ruin."

But I felt so helpless. I think I would have prayed in my walk that night if I had not felt that I must have strayed so far from God that he would not hear me.

Thus I waged the unequal war with my own thoughts throughout the night, with no interruptions, but again and again bringing up at that haven of peace, the spot where I could watch the window where *she* was performing her deeds of mercy.

The nightly occurrences of the street occasionally broke the monotony for an instant only. The most startling of these was at five o'clock in the morning, when it seemed that all the freight trains of christendom had broken loose, and were having a grand runaway holiday, — such is the effect of the nighttime to exaggerate sound. It was only the rumbling of the first street-cars of the morning breaking in upon the stillness. This made such a vivid impression upon me that it seems even now as though I could hear far off in the distance that incessant roar.

The newsboys began to run around the corners with their enormous packages of morning papers, almost as large as themselves; these they left noise-

lessly one by one at the doors of their regular subscribers.

Then I was startled by a great noise overhead, as though the inhabitants of heaven might have materialized, and taken to themselves wings for a morning peep at us ; but when I looked up, it seemed to be a great black, noisy, moving, cloud. Upon inquiry afterward, I found that it was composed of flocks of crows, millions in number, that found a resting place at night in the pines of Virginia, but emigrated in the morning to Maryland to get their breakfast.

Milk wagons went by with their various inscriptions ; but the most weird scene of that morning was that of the devout worshippers going to early mass, prayer-books in hand.

The serene-faced sisters of charity in their white bonnets, with crucifix and rosary, going two by two always, — what a rebuke to my godlessness this scene presented. I could but think that if all who professed Christianity were as devoted as these, how much better our world might be.

The gray light of morning was visible in the east, when, just before I passed the house of Mrs. Brooks for the last time, I saw Marion leave it and with bowed head slowly wend her way to her own home. The house servants of Washington, sons and daughters of Ham, might be seen in every direction, going their way from their own houses to their various places of employment, and I fancied that Marion looked at them as though this was her first view of the servant population abroad.

I saw her unlock her own door and disappear

within, before I turned my steps in the direction of my hotel and sought my room. I very quickly fell asleep from nervous and physical exhaustion, but I did not rest. I dreamed of Marion and the child's mother sitting through the livelong night (it seemed the longest I had ever known) by the bed of the little girl. Marion's cool hand was frequently placed upon her fevered brow, which seemed to soothe and comfort the dying child.

Bessie's breathing was very labored at times, very fitful, and it would seem to cease altogether. The mother would bend her head till she nearly touched the child to see if she still breathed, listening with intense earnestness for the little catch which showed that she had rallied again. She would then open wide her beautiful, large brown eyes, and seeming to divine her mother's fears, would say in an unearthly whisper, "I am all right, mamma."

This continued through that long interminable night, Bessie growing weaker and weaker, gently sinking to rest. I could see the color fade and the cheeks grow whiter and whiter, with the unmistakable stamp of death.

Just as the dawn appeared, it seemed as though the heavens above us opened, and the room was filled with white-robed spirits who stood around the bed, while angels with beautiful white wings hovered over the dying girl, and one came lower than the rest, who said in the sweetest and most melodious tone I ever heard, "Suffer little children to come unto me."

Bessie opened her eyes, brighter, they seemed,

than ever before, and said in a voice scarcely audible, "I am all right, mamma !"

The long vigil was ended, all was over, —and the mother with the most unearthly shriek I had ever heard fell unconscious into Marion's arms. Then I awoke.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. BROOKS received Marion at the door of her apartments, with a face from which every gleam of hope had fled.

"Bessie cannot last much longer," she said, with a quickly suppressed sob, and together they approached the bed, which stood near one of the front windows.

Bessie lay on the bed with closed eyes, and a face of such transparent pallor as one would imagine an angel child might wear. Her breathing was short and quick, and then would seem to cease altogether. The mother, breathless with terror, would stoop down until her face almost touched that of the child, listen for an instant, and then with an hysterical spring catch the camphor bottle, and in perfect silence bathe the white forehead, holding the open bottle where Bessie could inhale its pungent odor.

The effect of Mrs. Brooks' speechless agony upon Marion was terrible ; and leaving the room noiselessly, she sought and found Mrs. Weeks, the landlady, who in a subdued voice asked her nervously,—

"How is she now?"

Marion replied quickly, —

"I think she is dying. Is there any liquor in the house?"

Mrs. Weeks, appalled at the thought of a death

in her house, could hardly compel her lips to answer even in monosyllables ; but at last she whispered, —

“Is there anything we can do?”

“Yes: send Mr. Weeks for the doctor; tell him to come at once,” said Marion.

“But Mr. Weeks has been once, and the doctor was not in. I don’t believe he can do anything more. He changed her medicine after the hemorrhage, and left instructions to be followed until his return.”

“Well, send him again, please; for whatever is done must be done quickly.” And returning to the sick-room, she said, —

“Mrs. Brooks, have you any spirits?”

“Nothing but port wine,” said the mother.

“Get it,” said Marion, with that brevity which comes from nervous excitement.

The wine was brought, and administered as fast as the child would swallow, but she did not rally, and the same spasmodic breathing continued.

The mother’s tearless, breathless agony was terrible to witness, as the fluttering breath of the apparently dying girl would go and return; and when Marion could endure it no longer, she again sought Mrs. Weeks, who seemed to have recovered her usual quiet manner.

“Has Mr. Weeks returned?” asked Marion.

“Yes,” replied Mrs. Weeks; “but the doctor was out; he left word, however, for him to come over immediately on his return.”

“I cannot see,” she continued, “what has made her so ill again, for the doctor said this morning that

he had never witnessed so sudden and miraculous a change for the better in so sick a patient."

"The truth is," replied Marion, "that her mother is quite unfitted by her extreme nervousness for nursing her. She makes the child worse by every attempt that she makes to soothe her when she has those wild attacks of delirium. The night before I took care of her, she sprang out of bed several times in spite of all her mother could do to restrain her. The child's improvement this morning was probably the result of a quiet, restful night; for when she would begin to grow wild and restless, I would soothe and comfort her with my hand and voice until she slept again."

"Dr. Henderson has been very kind," said Mrs. Weeks. "He sent over a pitcher of milk this morning from his own Alderney cow, because he did not like to have her take mixed milk; and he permits no other nourishment."

"When did the hemorrhage occur, Mrs. Weeks?"

"About two o'clock; Bessie fainted, and the first intimation we had that she was worse, came in an unearthly shriek from Mrs. Brooks, which frightened me so that I could scarcely walk or summon aid for her. Do you think there is any hope, Miss Percival, after hemorrhage sets in?"

"I do not know," she replied. "I think the doctor expects another before morning, and that she will die of it," continued Mrs. Weeks nervously.

Marion returned to the sick-room, and an hour passed by with no apparent change, when Dr. Hen-

derson arrived accompanied by Dr. Kemp. The former stepped to the bedside, and said, —

"Bessie! How is my little girl to-night?"

Bessie opened her heavy eyes, and in a low whisper, answered, "Oh, I'm so sick, doctor!"

"Where is the pain?" he asked.

"No pain," she said, "only so tired."

"Just restless," he said, in his kind, fatherly voice, and stooping lifted her further on the pillow.

"I smell camphor," he said, turning to the mother; "do not use it about her, it is weakening. I see you have wine here; that is better; you may continue that."

Dr. Henderson threw a meaning glance on his colleague, and they together withdrew to the adjoining room. When they returned, Mrs. Brooks' eyes sought the face of Dr. Henderson with such speechless agony in their depths that Marion almost held her breath to listen to his reply when she asked in a husky voice, —

"Oh doctor, can you save my child? I cannot give her up! I have seen heavy sorrows, but this is the worst of all;" and deep sobs shook her delicate frame.

The doctor's kind hand was laid upon her arm.

"Hush, madam, do not disturb her," he said warningly.

She quickly checked all outward expression of her grief, and asked, —

"What shall I do if she has another hemorrhage?"

"You cannot do a single thing in the world, madam," he answered in a steady voice, while his

compassionate eyes rested on her face, and seemed to soothe and comfort her, though they robbed her of all hope ; "but you must not stay alone with Bessie any more," he added quietly.

"I shall have to keep Miss Percival, then," she said. "I cannot be alone with strangers."

"That will do," he assented, with a quick glance at Miss Percival. "I would stay myself had I not been up all last night."

"Would not Dr. Kemp stay?" asked Mrs. Brooks hesitatingly.

"He cannot, he is out now for the first time after a serious illness. Do not fear, you will do very well if this lady remains with you," he answered kindly ; and after a few directions the two physicians took their leave.

After an hour or two in which she seemed to be slowly sinking, Bessie rallied, and opening her large brown eyes said in a weak whisper, "I am better, mamma ;" then she dropped into a sweet sleep. There seemed to be very little change after that through the night, and Marion had nothing to do but to sit at the bedside and administer medicine at the intervals directed. She thus had abundant opportunity for reflection upon the strange events of the afternoon.

"What does it all mean?" she asked herself ; "what mocking fate sends Hugh Atherton across my path again? How could I care, even if he were free? The man who was my accepted lover in all but the engagement ring and the marriage date, who could without one word of explanation marry



"I am sorry Cousin Elinor is not in!" (Page 8.)

another woman within two weeks, ought to have no further place in my heart. Can it be possible that blighted faith and ruined confidence can be restored?"

Immediately after the marriage of Colonel Atherton, Marion's friends, who had not dared to speak before, warmly congratulated her on her escape from one whom they considered unworthy of her. Her friends Colonel Armstrong and Congressman Ingraham were in the possession of facts which were so prejudicial to the man's general character that they thought she might consider herself fortunate that all their friendly relations were hopelessly severed by his own rash act.

One of her friends, a journalist of Chicago, had called upon her, and, being a friend of long standing, had ventured to mention that he had heard it rumored that she was breaking her heart for Colonel Atherton. He said, —

"I could not credit the report, for I was sure there could be nothing in a man like Atherton to attract a woman like you. I know him well," he added, "and I must assure you that if I had ever heard of your marrying such a man I would have given your marriage notice to the public with the insignia of mourning. To hear of your death would be less sorrowful news to your friends than to know that you had sacrificed all the happiness and peace of your life to a marriage so unequal."

"Why unequal, Mr. Esmond?" Marion had questioned.

"Because he is destitute of that high sense of

honor which constitutes true manhood ; because he has no respectful conception of any woman ; and you consider your womanhood a crown of glory. He never speaks respectfully of women ; yet this much I will say, he always exhibits the utmost love and devotion for his daughter under all circumstances. You know, of course, that he is, or has been, a dissipated character?" he added in a questioning tone.

"Yes," replied Marion ; "but if he is dissipated he is not unprincipled, and I have never seen anything of it myself. I understand your estimate of Colonel Atherton, for my feelings do not blind me to the faults of those I love. Colonel Atherton had nothing which he wished to conceal from me, and I know from his own lips that his life has not been unimpeachable. You cannot appreciate my estimate of him, for you cannot know him as I did."

"That may be," he said quietly ; "there are redeeming qualities in most men."

"And Hugh Atherton certainly had them," she continued, "for, with no disposition to conceal defects, his estimable traits of character far excelled those of any other man I have ever known, while his faults are those which are common to most men, and not greater than theirs."

Marion had at that time utterly refused to believe in the unworthiness of the man she had loved ; but when at a later date proofs were brought to her of his attempt to ridicule her finest and tenderest feelings, she said to herself, —

"Alas, how low a man can stoop whose closest relationships are dishonorable!"

As all these memories passed in review before her she seemed to weigh them all as she had never done before; and over against Hugh Atherton's record was this legend: "Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting."

Sitting by the bedside of this spotless child such visions came to her of the contrast between her and the sin-crushed man whom she had so lately met, as only such surroundings could bring. This midnight hour seemed to summon up all the witnesses of the past to testify against the man she loved; for, struggle as she would for independence, the strife was useless. Hugh Atherton held her heart as completely as he had ever done. It seemed as if the two dreary, desolate years that had passed since she last looked upon his face and heard his voice were gone in a moment, and all the old relations had been resumed. Turn in what direction she would, not a single ray of light could be found to brighten her future, unless it came through the sunshine of Hugh Atherton's love.

As the night wore on and her brain became more weary, there came to her a crushing sense of the dishonor of the man who could deliberately win a woman's love by that irresistible power of looking and acting love in private and in public, by throwing around her every winning device, by weaving into every fibre of her being his own magnetic personality, by discussing everything upon which a misunderstanding could arise in a future passed

together, and, transcending all this, by confessing every personal defect, exhibiting all his business deficiencies, making known every personal taste which could conflict with hers, concealing absolutely nothing, — in short, putting on such an appearance of manly integrity as no woman could resist ; yet holding himself free from all responsibility because he had not said, "Be my wife !" and definitely named the day.

All this retrospect brought such a sense of weariness and hopelessness that she dropped her face in her hands and sobbed aloud. She longed for the morning light to shut out these visions, and banish her sense of self-abasement that she could be the victim of this unhappy love.

" Why did she love him ? Curious fool, be still !
Is human love the growth of human will ? "

The broad light of day, and what sleep she could obtain after reaching home, brought a calmer mood, and the grace to cover unfortunate Hugh Atherton and all his faults with the mantle of charity.

CHAPTER V.

DESPATCHING a hasty breakfast some minutes before my usual time, I reached the office, and immediately sending an orderly for Major Follet, locked my door against all intruders.

The escapade had already become a subject of general discussion ; and this action on my part only intensified the excitement of all those who saw me enter the office.

Ten minutes had not passed before the major arrived. As I admitted him and again locked the door, I noticed the white, set look which revealed the perturbation of his mind. I turned and faced him.

"Follet, tell me all you know of this shocking affair," I demanded.

I threw myself into my desk chair, and leaning forward, again repeated, —

"Sit down and tell me all you know !"

He silently took a chair, and biting his lips, seemed to struggle for words that would hurt me as little as possible ; for he knew that what was coming would deal me a serious blow. I could bear it no longer, and, determined to know the truth, exclaimed, —

"For God's sake, Follet, why don't you speak?"

"Colonel," he answered with emotion, "you under-

stand my friendship for you ; it seems to me that I cannot tell you what I have heard."

"Great heavens, man, tell me everything, and tell it quickly, for this is torture. If you need any stimulus, I can tell you that I have a hint of what is coming, for it seems the whole post knows sooner than I do. When I was leaving my house I heard loud talking between the cook and the striker. I could not help hearing every word. The cook Mary was indignantly saying, —

" 'May the saints preserve us ! but that is a lie intirely. Colonel Atherton wrong any leddy ? He w'udn't do sich a thing at all at all, let alone his own ward Miss Ethel, the darlint ! Yez ought to be ashamed fer spakin' of it.' "

" 'I didn't say I believed it, did I ? but that's what they're sayin' all over the post,' answered the man.

"Mary evidently wrestled valiantly with the pots and pans for a moment, and then her shrill Irish voice ejaculated. —

" 'The lyin' huzzies ! may the Howly Mother defend us ! It's low bastes they are intirely, the hull blasted lot of 'em.' "

It was several seconds before Follet could speak. At last he said, —

"It is true, colonel, those wretched young men have in some way been the cause of the worst scandal that has ever been known in the regiment. Your name and Miss Ethel's have been used unwarrantably. It is a damnably wicked business, and I don't

see where it is to end. Why they should charge you with — with —”

“Not another word, Follet,” I said; “I understand it all;” and dropping my face on my hands, my whole heart swelled with tenderness for my fatherless ward.

Looking up at Follet’s amazed face, I saw that he misunderstood me, and I hastened to say, —

“As if I could wrong that innocent child! and Follet,” I cried, springing to my feet, “she must never know of this rumor, — she would not live five minutes; she is very ill, has some trouble with the heart, probably inherited from her father.”

I walked the floor in unconcealed agitation, and stopping suddenly said, —

“What can I do?”

The major was twisting his hands nervously and knotting his forehead to unravel the hopeless puzzle, when there came a rap at the door. It was an orderly sent by the adjutant to say that it was nine o’clock, time for guard-mount, and had the colonel any business before he went out?

“I am the old officer of the day,” said Follett; “ought I not to go?”

“Not yet,” I said; “send word to them to go on without you.”

Closing the door after the orderly, I said, “There is no question as to what these lieutenants deserve; but what to do, or what is advisable to do in these circumstances, I do not know. What do they say?”

“They indignantly deny, sir, everything in connection with any post ladies’ names having been

mentioned by them, and challenge me to prove it. Indeed, colonel, I think I would take Miss Ethel and her mother and your son to the lake till this blows over ; or you can plan to send them abroad for Miss Ethel's health, that would keep them out of the way, and in the mean time I will investigate further. If these reports of their misdoings can be verified by competent evidence, I will quietly tell them that they must quit the service at once and forever. It is not the way such things should be done, but it is better than the notoriety of a public trial."

"If it were not for Ethel's heart trouble, the matter should never end here, by Heaven ! never !" I exclaimed. "I would pursue them to the ends of the earth. But I presume you are right : I do not feel capable of deciding for myself in this case. I will try to get them off on the noon boat. Go and engage passage for us, and I will return to the house to make arrangements."

Follet went immediately to the steamer office as directed, and I turned my steps towards home. As I reached the gate, I met Surgeon Ranney coming out. Extending my hand, with a forced smile I said, —

"Good-morning, Ranney ! I hope you found our patient all right, and able to take a trip on the river this morning !"

The doctor's face clouded ominously, and still holding my hand he pressed it closely, while calmly but with decision he said, —

"Ethel cannot raise her head to-day, if she ever does again."

"Is she really as ill as that?" I inquired.

"She is only just alive, colonel, and no one can tell what the outcome will be. Her case is most puzzling. It seems to be an exceedingly weak action of the heart, but ordinarily that alone would not be so prostrating. If a patient rallies at all, she is quite herself again in a few hours. Is there anything in her life that could cause mental worry?"

"Not to my knowledge, doctor."

"It is singular case," he said, shaking his head; "inexplicable."

I entered the house and went directly to Ethel's room. Her mother admitted me and turning to Ethel said, —

"Look up my daughter, here is Colonel Ather-ton."

At the sound of my name she opened her languid eyes and tried to smile; she reached out her little hand so like a child's in all its dimpled loveliness that I stooped and kissed the delicate wrist! Her blue eyes brightened and darkened, and a slight flush on her pale cheek made her look almost like herself again. I smiled, and said cheerfully, —

"This is a pretty rôle for you to play just as I wanted to take the family down the river! I want you to get well at once, for I can't have my trip spoiled."

"When?" she asked in a weak voice, almost a whisper.

"No, you must not talk," I said, laying my finger on her pretty lips, "but get well as fast as you can, for I cannot go without my girlie."

She seemed to brighten with every word, but the doctor had ordered perfect quiet and a constant atmosphere of cheerfulness, so that I took my departure before the heavy lines of care and vexation, which the last twenty-four hours had made on my face and brow, could catch her watchful eye.

Oppressed with dark forebodings, I returned to headquarters and at once despatched an orderly to the steamer office to cancel the order for passage for my family party, owing to the sudden and dangerous illness of Miss Grey.

As soon as this was known it only added fuel to the flames. The strikers of the various officers' families, and even the marketmen from town, had become news-carriers, and the growth of each story as it passed from lip to lip was marvellous.

I believe that few men in the service have been honored with more universal respect and love than I had always been. I am sure that it was with sincere regret that my brother officers saw me so deeply troubled.

I think some member of every officer's family at the post had called at my quarters, or sent a messenger to express sympathy or offer assistance, and to obtain particulars of Ethel's sickness, before the afternoon band-playing on the parade. Mrs. Heath came in person, and, learning all that could be ascertained about it, expressed the utmost sympathy, and at once entered upon a round of calls, to inform the garrison of "poor dear Ethel's illness." At each call her budget grew larger, and when she

arrived at Captain Webber's, it was brimming over with news.

Mrs. Webber received her on the piazza. Seating herself hurriedly, she ejaculated, —

"What can it mean, Mrs. Webber? Ethel is sick unto death. Lieutenant Winchester was on a terrible spree last night, and rumor says he talked in the most shameful manner in the Casino about Ethel. The colonel is all mixed up in it, too. Have you heard anything?"

"Nothing, Mrs. Heath, but gossip unworthy of repetition. There must be some deep-laid plot, or I greatly mistake. Lieutenant Winchester is not given to dissipation, and Colonel Atherton is the soul of honor. We have known him for twenty years."

"But, you know, they say that Winchester discovered something that was compromising to the colonel, and went and told Miss Ethel, and she fainted dead away; and then he went off on this spree and let it all out, and they're all mixed up in it!" and Mrs. Heath stopped all out of breath, and pretty badly mixed herself.

Mrs. Webber said gravely, "All this is quite impossible, Mrs. Heath, and the course for us to take is to say as little about it as possible. I would dismiss it from my mind at once."

Mrs. Heath had gleaned nothing from Mrs. Webber to add to her store of knowledge in regard to the scandal, and soon taking leave, she proceeded to the adjutant's cottage.

Mrs. Dowd was a woman who was always ready

for an hour's gossip, and her malicious little tongue had involved her in many difficulties from which it required all her husband's deserved popularity in the garrison to extricate her. Seeing Mrs. Heath approaching, she met her at the door and exclaimed, —

"Dear, dear, Mrs. Heath, are there any further developments in this scandalous matter? Of course it's dreadful, but it had to come, it has been brewing a long time. I am not in the least surprised. I never did think that Colonel Atherton's family were so much better than other folks. The men all know how fast he has become since he has been a widower;" and Mrs. Dowd paused for want of breath.

"Do you know anything about his engagement to that lady in Washington?" asked Mrs. Heath.

"Well, I've heard that he was engaged to two of them, and couldn't make up his mind which to take. I call that wicked flirtation."

"So do I," said Mrs. Heath, "and I think he might have been satisfied without flirting with his ward too."

"Maybe, if Mrs. Grey hadn't been quite so exclusive, and so afraid of Ethel's associating with the garrison people, she wouldn't have got into this trouble. I never did like Ethel Grey; she's a proud, stuck-up piece anyway."

Mrs. Dowd's young daughter Ella entered the room just in time to hear the last sentence of her mother's speech, and pausing in astonishment she said, —

"Why, who are you talking about? Not our Miss Ethel?"

"Yes, our Miss Ethel!" said her mother in a mocking tone.

Had Ella been a mature woman instead of the spoiled pet of a doting father whose image she was, not only in physical appearance but in admirable character, she would no doubt have defended her friend from all aspersions against her character in mild but decided terms; but being an impulsive girl, intense in her friendships, and free to express her opinions, she flew to the defence of Ethel, and denounced in unmeasured terms all those who dared to call her anything but the very sweetest and best girl in the world.

As might have been expected, she was peremptorily ordered to leave the room and not make her appearance again until she could treat her mother with proper respect.

The female portion of the garrison were on the parade in force to listen to the band. I sat in my office, wondering "what next?" when Adjutant Dowd came in hastily and laid a telegram before me.

In a moment the ringing notes of officers' call resounded throughout the post. Amazed, but with promptness, captains and subalterns hurried to headquarters. The band, which had already begun playing, stopped at a signal from the leader and quietly disappeared. The ladies in large numbers congregated at Adjutant Dowd's, while the men gathered in squads in front of their quarters and watched the assembly at the office.

Then Adjutant Dowd read the telegram from the railroad superintendent at headquarters at — :

"The Indians have jumped the reservation, and Hans Schwartz's ranch, thirty miles from here, has been wiped out, except one man who brings the news. Five hundred citizens, armed, will leave here by special train in an hour. Women and children on the claims being taken into town. A special train is placed at your disposal."

Captain Webber was ordered to command the battalion. The captain of B Company was East on leave, and there seemed nothing to do but to place Lieutenant Winchester in command of the company ; and, on the whole, I was glad to get him away for a few days until I could think more clearly.

In a few minutes all was excitement, and the quick stirring orders were heard, —

"Field kits ! Two days' rations, — cartridges, haversacks, canteens, and nothing else. Get ready lively !"

The two companies on board and the train started, I repaired to the house. Dr. Ranney had gone over immediately, knowing that Ethel must hear enough to be curious ; but to his surprise she seemed listlessly indifferent to all outside disturbance.

I met her mother in the hall, and seeing her sad pale face I said, "Is she worse?" and my own heart throbbed painfully as I awaited her answer.

"No," she replied, "she has been all day very much as she was this morning, but does not seem to have life enough to rally ;" then raising her sad eyes to my face, she exclaimed, as a great sob seemed to

tear its way into her voice, "Colonel Atherton, what shall I do if I have to give her up? O God, I cannot!" and sinking helplessly on the stairway she broke into uncontrollable sobs.

My heart swelled, but I controlled my feelings and bounded up the stairway.

As I entered the room Ethel looked up with her own bright smile of welcome, and held out her little hand, which I pressed to my lips. She had not spoken of garrison doings up to this time, but the question was clearly visible in her eyes before it escaped her lips.

"Colonel, what is the disturbance?"

"Some ranchman, scared out of his wits about Indians, one hundred miles out in the country. Nothing more than that," I added, as I saw the strange look in her wide eyes.

Her little fingers closed tightly on mine, and in a tone I never shall forget, she asked, —

"Are you going?"

"Not unless there is something more than a scare," I answered reassuringly; but I saw at that moment a look in her lovely eyes which told me a story of which I had never dreamed, and for one instant I longed to clasp her in my arms and bid her live for me. I was once more a boy and this was my little sweetheart. For a moment the past was forgotten, the queenly woman whom I so dearly loved in the far-off capital city was swept out of my mind. The revelation was startling enough to call me quickly to my senses as Ethel asked, —

"Who has gone?"

"Captain Webber's company, and B Company, in command of Lieutenant Winchester," I answered.

I watched her narrowly as I gave this information, and noticed a look of such evident relief that I was convinced, whatever feeling she had towards him, that love had nothing to do with it. After this she seemed to relapse into her former listless condition.

Dr. Ranney had carefully noticed all this with knitted brows. He soon arose to take leave, and I accompanied him to the door.

"Well, doctor," I said, "what of Ethel's condition to-night?" He shook his head, and slowly replied,—

"Colonel, the cause of her illness is mental, not physical, and unless the cause is removed I fear she will never be any better than she is to-night. There is scarcely any possibility that she can in any case ever be well again. The shock—whatever it was—has been too much for her frail constitution. You may be able to obtain her confidence, but her mother and I have both tried in vain."

"I will try," I said; and returning to the room I told Mrs. Grey that Mrs. Ranney, who had just opportunely called, was waiting in the parlor to see her.

Taking the chair by Ethel's bedside, once more I dropped my lips to her dimpled hand, and as her sweet blue eyes were raised to mine, I read there the wondrous story of her innocent love, and the young life which was mine to keep and hold,—or to reject and quench its sweet light forever.

With one pang of regret, with a great wrench of my heart-strings, I turned resolutely from the hopes

I had cherished yesterday, and bending over the couch of Ethel, I said tenderly, —

"Ethel, my darling, do you love me? Live for me, sweet one!"

Her arms were round my neck, her head on my breast in an instant, and I then and there registered a vow to be true to my little love, and cherish her frail life as if I had chosen her from all the world.

Did I gain her confidence? Yes! She told me all the story. I had divined before all that I now learned to be true.

I held a private consultation with Surgeon Ranney. I do not say that I gave him my diagnosis of the case, — but — we were married that night, Ethel and I.

CHAPTER VI.

ONE evening following my first interview with Marion Percival, found me nervously anxious to see her again ; and at a suitable hour I deliberately turned my steps in that direction, my thoughts outstripping my feet, and dwelling on the woman who had won and kept my manhood's love and reverence.

Marion was the daughter of an army chaplain. Her father, though poor in this world's goods, was endowed with rare intellectual and spiritual gifts. He believed education to be the best capital he could give his children ; and as it was all that he could do for them, they received every advantage possible.

Marion not only completed her classical course at Ann Arbor, but remained for a medical course. She then went with an aunt to Europe, and spent two years in Paris, to receive the benefit of the medical schools in that city. After her return, she joined her father at his post, where she soon built up a lucrative practice. When her father retired, like many other officers he sought a home at the nation's capital, where he might spend his declining years in the peace and quietude which the noble American army have done so much to secure.

Marion came with him, and made the pleasant home on Massachusetts Avenue a place which bright women and manly men loved to visit. She possessed

all the charms of manner which could be acquired in conventional circles, with a versatility which readily adapted itself to circumstances. Her profession had given her a practical knowledge of the inner life of the world, and her personal sympathy with every form of human weakness had grown out of her clear comprehension of humanity's needs as she had been brought in contact with them. As a woman, she was pure, womanly ; as a philanthropist, she was just as well as generous.

These dual schools of culture, the theoretical and the practical, the conservative and the liberal, had served to keep Marion, as it has many other great-hearted women, youthful in appearance as well as in feeling. She was not worn out with the burdensome work of killing time, nor with the infinite weariness which comes from the incessant whirl of the fashionable society "swim," but full of that vitality which is the result of a well-balanced mind and a vigorous constitution, influencing all who came into her presence. The atmosphere of her society was like the sweetness and fragrance of an invigorating spring breeze. Sweet, calm, and cool, she would be in her husband's life, if she ever married, a regnant queen. She possessed a pure and clear complexion, eyes of that deep, dark, varying blue which changed with every thought, lips of winning sweetness, a broad but not high forehead, and a profusion of pearl blond hair, dressed apparently with reference to dignity rather than girlishness of appearance. Marvellously self-possessed, she had that heroism of soul which always does the duty that lies nearest, regardless of

conventional codes. Her wondrous eyes were her greatest charm, — I have watched them in days gone by, answering to her slightest moods, now assuming the ingenuousness of an innocent child, then the sparkle of the society belle, giving point to the quick repartee, or the harmless *bon-mot*, now melting into sympathetic tenderness, or flashing with just indignation, or — as I had seen them — soul-full of a love and fidelity as far reaching as the universe of God.

Would they ever have that look for me again?

I promised myself, as I walked toward Dr. Percival's house, that it should be the business of my life to win from her that look of infinite love once more.

I found her alone in the library, her chair drawn up before the grate, looking abstractedly into the blazing coals.

"Fair, oh, fair and sweet," my heart said, "how unworthy I am of thee!" but I determined to win her nevertheless.

She had not heard my name, but as I entered, she arose with a beaming face, and gave me her hand in welcome with a "Good-evening, Colonel Atherton. Come and look into the fire with me. I was building castles, and had quite a feudal domain erected when I heard your footsteps."

I was by this time seated on the sofa, while she resumed the chair from which she had risen.

How did you leave every thing at Deering?" she asked.

"Well and quiet," I answered.

"And how are Surgeon and Mrs. Ranney, and the Dowds, and all the other people I know?"

"The Ranneys are unchanged since you last saw them. Mrs. Dowd is the same old sixpence, never happy unless she is disturbing somebody's peace. Happily, Ella bears no resemblance to her mother. Good Dowd seems likely to have some comfort in life yet, as Ella promises to be all that he has hoped for her," I replied.

"I suppose that Ella has developed into a beautiful young woman," she continued thoughtfully.

"She is charming in her own way, and has all her father's good qualities, but is only a girl yet," I said.

With her coolest smile and most indifferent manner, she asked, —

"Shall you remain long in Washington, colonel, or will the little Hugh Atherton Clayton prove so great an attraction to his grandpapa that his old haunts will know him no more?"

I winced a little at this new title, for my daughter's little son was only a few weeks old, and one does not like to appear patriarchal before the woman he loves and wants to marry. Somehow I thought that she asked the question to show me that she thought me quite too old to think of matrimony; but I determined to speak to the point at once, and said earnestly, —

"Whether my stay will be long or short, rests wholly with you, Marion."

Her perplexed look mystified me, but I continued,

"I have suffered much from the great wrong I did

you, but I will make amends. Will you not forgive me?"

Still she did not reply, and perplexity seemed merged in amazement, then in indignation, as I said,

"Believe me, Marion, you shall never regret it; only give me once more the confidence I have forfeited, and all my life shall be devoted to making you as happy as you once dreamed we might be."

Her white hand was instantly raised as she exclaimed sharply, —

"Not another word, Hugh Atherton; how dare you?"

I could not understand her strange manner; but thinking that she still resented what she must feel as my unmanly desertion, I said sorrowfully, —

"A woman cannot comprehend a man's desperate nature; even you, who are the most charitable of women, cannot understand what we have to contend with."

She was moved to forbearance at last by my tone or manner, for she said, —

"You quite mistake, Colonel Atherton. Woman's nature is far more intense than man's, her feelings are more sensitive, her emotions more easily wrought upon, the blood courses through her veins just as wildly, and though she may suffer in silence, she suffers none the less. Your feelings were no more desperate than my own, but my actions may have been in better subjection to an enlightened conscience."

I had become more and more puzzled, and, though she had never indulged in religious cant in the olden

times, I was moved to wonder if she were thinking of my godlessness, and it was that which made me repulsive to her pure, true nature and her spotless life.

"Marion," I queried humbly, "do you think that religion helps a man to control his actions always?"

She gave me a peculiar surprised look, and replied gravely, —

"The question between us is one of morality, not of religion; still I never look into my own heart and think of the possibilities of sin in my own nature, that I do not thank God for his grace, and tremble for what might have been but for my Christian training."

Her grave earnestness appealed to my better nature, and I said, —

"You might convince me of its efficacy, perhaps, for your sincerity is undoubted. I am at least certain that there is something about you, whatever its origin or name, which gives you a subtle power to make me what you will, and without that influence I am lost."

Marion's religion was not the narrow one of creeds, nor yet the bigoted intellectual religion of theological ethics, but was built on the broad charitable basis of God's infinite love. It seemed to be innate rather than acquired.

"Marion," I continued, "I confess that I am not a Christian, but I honor and admire those who are, — and I love you. I have come over many weary miles to tell you so."

"Colonel Atherton," she said sadly and reproach-

fully, "you were not given in the old days to idle or unmanly words; you would have spurned an ungentlemanly act or a false word. What have I done, what have you become, that you dare," — and overcome by her emotion, she stopped, choked back the sobs which impeded her utterance, and silently covered her face with her hands.

I was deeply moved, though more and more mystified.

"We do not seem to understand each other to-night, Marion," I said huskily. "I am not aware of having said anything ungentlemanly or false. I have told you honestly that I love you, and I believe that you love me." Then taking her hands in mine and removing them from her flushed face, I added, "Look up, dear one, and say that I am not mistaken."

She looked me full in the face with indignantly flashing eyes, and in a clear incisive tone said, —

"Such language from a married man to an honest woman is too inexcusable, too basely dishonorable for reply. Go, and never let me see your face again!"

I sprang to my feet in astonishment.

"Marion!" I exclaimed, "is it possible that you have not heard of Ethel's death?"

Every vestige of color left her face, her eyes became expressionless, and with a clutch at the arm of the sofa she reeled forward, and I caught her in my arms and tried to rest her head upon my shoulder, but even then she resisted me, and with a strong effort of will regained possession of herself, saying faintly, "Do not be alarmed, I am all right!" Then

leaning heavily back in the arm-chair where I had placed her, she closed her heavy eyelids, and presently I saw the slow tears falling down her pale cheeks."

My heart swelled with such a tenderness for her that I dared not trust myself, and walking to the mantel I leaned my elbow on its corner, and shading my eyes stood there in silence until I had controlled my voice sufficiently to address her again.

"Marion!" I said, "forgive me, but I thought you knew. I have been precipitate, perhaps, but I have been so hungry for your presence, your love, my darling!"

With tearfully flashing eyes she turned towards me with, —

"Then how could you so cruelly leave me?"

"Do not ask me, Marion. It was an act for which I was not responsible; but, thank God, we have met again," and turning from her I paced the length of the parlor, returned, stopped before her, and looking down into her honest eyes continued, —

"I cannot look into those true and tender eyes without knowing that you love me; but, O my love, you cannot conceive my wretchedness, my strong yearning for you, through all this weary time."

With a quick gesture she replied quickly, —

"That is enough; Colonel Atherton, you cannot know what you are saying. The past is past; why recall its bitterness? Be calm and say nothing which to-morrow you will wish unsaid."

"But I must talk to you," I said."

"Not even to me, Hugh," she replied. "It is quite unnecessary. It is much better to bear in silence what we cannot remedy."

My heart gave a great bound as I heard my name escape her lips, and taking one quick step towards her I essayed to clasp her in my arms ; but she still eluded my grasp, for raising her white hand she held me at a distance while she said, —

"Not yet. Give me time to think. I am too surprised, too agitated, to think clearly to-night. I must adjust myself to the new order of things, and you — must wait."

She said these last words with a sweet but wan smile, which made me feel what a brute I was to try her strength any further ; and with reluctance, but with the dawning of a new hope in my heart, I bade her good-night.

CHAPTER VII.

OUR "Ruthie," as we called her, was the only child God ever gave us. Her features were the reproduction of mine, but the resemblance went no further; for even as a child she exhibited great amiability of character.

As an infant she was a lovely being, all sunshine and smiles, and never cost us one sleepless night. When, weary and worn with my day's occupations, I entered my own door, her spring of delight towards my open arms, and her little nestling head on my shoulder, seemed to take away all sense of weariness; and as she grew older her sweet influence made itself felt in other ways. However disturbed and perplexed I might be, her bright face and laughing eyes would put all the evil spirits to rout. Climbing on my knee and putting one arm around my neck, she would look roguishly into my eyes, with her sweet lips parted, and say, —

"Tan oo see any tiss in my mous for papa?"

I would take her little chin in my hand, looking earnestly between the parted lips, and say, —

"I think I see one."

"Not any more'n one?" she would ask reproachfully.

Upon which I would examine the little open mouth more closely, and at last feign to discover the hidden treasures, exclaiming, —

"Oh, I see a whole crowd of them chasing each other to see which will get to papa first."

Then she would put both arms around my neck and we would literally smother each other with kisses.

When she grew older she would run to bring my dressing-gown and slippers, and as a matter of course take her seat upon my knee after they were on, her sweet face all aglow with pleasure, and her chief topic of conversation the things she would do for papa's comfort when she should become a woman.

When we laid her mother to rest she was still but a child to me, though nearly eighteen years of age, and to her I devoted my life.

She lived no less truly for me ; no pleasure seemed complete to her unless shared with papa ; and I had never dreamed that a change could come when all this would be insufficient to make her life's happiness. How blind men are !

One Sunday, after dinner, when I had been praising her housekeeping, — for I had noticed that everything had been arranged with special reference to what "papa liked best," — she came and stood by the side of my chair, and somehow it seemed to me that a great change had come over her ; she seemed suddenly transformed from a child to a woman, my baby Ruth no longer. As she stood there I realized that some subtle influence had gone over her life, at once making her more lovable and less my sole possession than she had been.

No longer my little girl, but a radiant woman, so pure, so beautiful, that she seemed an angel from a

purser and fairer world than I had ever dreamed of. I have never been able to tell what grace she had taken on that impressed me so; but I felt an influence about me which would forever protest against any sin or self-indulgence in my life.

Her complexion was transparent in its whiteness. Her lovely eyes were like velvet in their soft depths. Her soft brown hair, with golden lights in its wavy abundance, left her pure brow unshaded, — a picture to gladden a father's or — a lover's heart.

Ah, a lover's! My heart gave a great bound as this thought went through my mind. It was coming, then, this trial of my love for my child.

She was dressed in some black, soft material, which clung in large folds to her tall, slight form, and for a moment her face was waxen in its whiteness; then she laid her little hand upon my shoulder and waited for me to speak.

"What does papa's darling want now?" I asked pleasantly.

"Something that — that I — that I'm afraid —"

"Afraid of your father, my daughter? Have I ever refused you anything?"

She had stood a little behind me. I reached back, and taking her by the arm brought her in front of me, then pulling her to her old seat on my knee, said kindly, —

"Now, little girl, tell all about it."

She took the proffered seat, the rosy flush returning to her face in waves of light; but she still waited.

"What great boon does my child crave, that she

hesitates to ask the father who has always been happy to grant her slightest wish? When did you begin to lose confidence in me, dear?" I asked reproachfully, as I tried to look in her averted eyes, and tightened the clasp of my arm around her waist.

"O papa!" she exclaimed, as she suddenly faced me with tear-filled eyes, "it is not that." Then with a flash of mischief she continued: "I want to ask you if — you — would — adopt — a nice boy? 'Twould be so nice to have a boy to love you too!" and the little witch held my face between her two small hands and kissed me repeatedly on the mouth.

"And don't you think you can love me all that one father deserves?" I said gravely.

She looked me in the eyes, and answered just as gravely, —

"I think it would be a good plan for us both to adopt him, for he likes you almost as much as I do, — and he likes me most as much as you do, and — I know he'd like to have you take him."

Putting my hand under her chin, I raised the beautiful, piquant face on a level with mine, and said, —

"So he has been consulting you before speaking to me, has he?"

"Well, yes! He — he asked me if I would like it if you would consent, — but I made him promise that he wouldn't say anything to you till I had."

"Well, my daughter," I said, still seriously, "I shall have to know, I think, who this ambitious young man is before I entertain your proposition."

She whispered the name "Austin Clayton," and dropped her bright head on my shoulder in a perfect storm of sobs. I put my arm about her, almost as overcome as she was. I knew that she had drifted away from me, that the best of her life would henceforth belong to another, and I was powerless to change this inevitable law of nature. I would not if I could.

I knew of no one into whose keeping I would more willingly give my precious child. Austin Clayton was a brother of Mrs. Heath. His father was a wealthy merchant in New York, and Austin was a young man of exceptional worth. He visited his sister once a year, and kept the post alive with merriment while he stayed. He was a partner of his father, a youth of fine address, and altogether an unexceptionable prospective son-in-law.

The shock was a severe one to me ; but recovering myself quickly, I said, while I pressed my daughter to my heart, —

"My child, is it possible that you know me so little that you can doubt my consent to anything which would contribute to your happiness? I shall be lonely without you, for I cannot hope to keep you long ; but I can put your hand in that of Austin Clayton without a fear for your future. He is a most worthy young man, and I would rather surrender you to him than to any man I know."

She had ceased her sobbing, and with a loving kiss exclaimed, —

"You are the best and dearest papa in the world."

"Then do not doubt me again," I said as she slipped from my lap and ran hastily to her room, leaving me to battle with my sore heart as best I might.

It is a sorrowful task to give the treasure you love best into the hand of another, although you may not doubt the custodian. The jewel sparkles no longer on your own breast, but lights and enriches another home than yours.

God pity us when we are thus left desolate !

CHAPTER VIII.

THE marriage ceremony was hardly over when the orderly came with a telegram. I hastily tore it open. It read, —

“THE JUNCTION.

“The Indian business was all a scare. We shall return to-night.

JAMES WEBBER,

“*in command.*”

This obliged me to go immediately to the office; and hailing any change as a relief, I immediately turned my steps thitherward.

I felt the most oppressive sense of bondage the moment the words were spoken which made me the husband of the innocent girl who loved me. It was almost impossible for me to give more than a faint response to the soldierly congratulations I received as I passed through the groups that thronged the square, on my way to the office, chafing under the consciousness that I must look more troubled and worried than they had ever before seen me.

The train soon came in bearing the two companies of soldiers. Webber reported at once.

“It was all a wild-geese chase,” he said; “there were no Indians. It all grew out of a young fellow rushing into the camp, where the seven ranchmen were quietly chatting, and giving a furious war-whoop for fun. The one man who escaped crept

out of the tent, dashed into the river and swam away, then taking to his heels ran so fast that they could not overtake him. He was nearly insane with fright when he reached the Junction, and was positively certain that he saw every other man scalped. Five hundred citizens were armed and aboard the train before the horseman who followed him had arrived."

At this moment there was a rap at the door, and in answer to my "Come in!" Major Follet entered.

Captain Webber, evidently judging that the major had business with me which did not require his presence, withdrew.

"Lock the door, Follet," I said, feeling a sort of relief as I heard the bolt slip into the socket, for here behind this closed door no curious eyes were on me trying to wrench from me the secret of my hasty marriage.

Follet was too loyal to be curious. Not by word or look would he question the actions of his colonel. In his code of honor his superior officer was the undoubted keeper of his own conscience and the regulator of his own life. Not even in thought would he question this right.

"Sit down," I said, "and tell me what you have heard further in regard to the two lieutenants."

"Well, it's quite a long story, sir," he answered with a deprecating look, but I merely motioned him to go on.

"Lieutenant Winchester was seen to rush headlong from your house and go in the direction of the store. He did not seem to be bound for any place

in particular, or to care what became of him, when he was suddenly accosted by Lieutenant Howland of the cavalry, with, —

“‘I say, hello, Winchester! Where are you going at that wild pace?’

“Winchester halted, and assuming his usual manner replied, —

“‘Oh, nowhere in particular.’

“‘What do you say, then, to going in for a good time this evening? There isn’t much fun in hanging around here.’

“‘I say all right!’ answered Winchester recklessly. ‘I don’t much care what becomes of me.’

“Entering the store they called for drinks, tried a game of billiards, and then, finding it extremely dull, Howland proposed a walk to the city, less than a mile distant.”

Blackwood City had derived its name from the burnt and blackened trunks of trees which covered the hills at the time when the town was located. It was at this time in its infancy, a typical frontier town. Its buildings were temporary, — literally thrown together over people’s heads, for the immediate purpose of establishing a town. Nearly every place of business had a saloon annex. The courtesan element was as well represented as is usual at this stage of a frontier town’s existence. As civilizing influences get a foothold the great mass of these vicious elements move on beyond the reach of law and order. No lady here dared to venture on the street, even by daylight, without a male escort.

“It seems, sir,” continued Follet, “that the young

men visited a restaurant, called for dinner for two, drank freely of champagne, and joined some others in a boisterous game or two. They were pretty well warmed up by the champagne, and in a mood for almost any excess when ten o'clock came, and Winchester proposed returning to the post. As they stepped into the street Howland said that 'pandemonium seemed to be turned loose.' Reeling men and shameless women came out of the lighted dance-houses, and the open doors seemed to beckon the young men to enter. They were too easily swept into this vortex of wild revelry, and the upshot of the business was that the night ended with a disgraceful debauch in the Casino."

I would not ask the question which was uppermost in my mind, namely, how Ethel's name became mixed up in such a row ; but I groaned heavily, and ejaculated, —

"This is shameful !"

"It is, sir," he answered ; "but I failed to find any one who heard them mention the names of any of the post ladies. No one seems to know anything about it except what was gathered from that article in the 'Frontiersman.'"

"Thank God for that, Follet !" I said.

"Indeed, sir, after they became intoxicated, Lieutenant Winchester was intent only, he declared, on 'cleaning out the whole ranch of red-coats.'"

"He evidently thought," I replied with a smile, "that he had discovered a ranch of wild Indians, and, soldier-like, proceeded to dispose of them."

I would not allow Follet to think that I bore any malice towards the lieutenant.

"Exactly that, sir; he attempted to shoot promiscuously into the crowd, while Howland, less affected by drink, tried earnestly to control him."

"And that was all you ascertained, then?" I asked.

"Oh, no, sir. I went to the office of the 'Frontiersman' and spoke to the editor about the article which created such a sensation. He said he knew nothing about it; but with some difficulty he found the reporter who furnished the matter, and learned from him that the source of his information was Miriano Gonzales, the Spanish musician."

"Well, where did *he* get it?" I impatiently asked.

"He was mustered out yesterday, sir."

"Gonzales!" I repeated reflectively. "Is not he the man who holds some grudge against Winchester?"

"I presume so; he never liked the lieutenant's 'high-mightiness,' as he chose to call it. Gonzales' antecedents are unknown here, but the men all think that he has once held a higher position than that he now occupies."

"Where is he now, Follet?"

"He has left the country; said he was going to Chicago."

"That ends all investigation in that direction," I said, with a twinge of disappointment. "Well, I'll think this all over and decide what to do about it."

Follet had risen, cap in hand, and was moving towards the door, when I said suddenly, —

"Ethel and I were married this evening, Major Follet."

He stepped back with a pleased smile on his honest face, and said heartily, —

"Allow me to congratulate you, colonel ; and a long life and a happy one to you both !"

I gave him my hand, but my smile must have been forced, for Follet looked dismayed at the manner of my receiving his congratulations.

It seemed utterly impossible for me to keep in mind that I must appear the happy bridegroom. My manner betrayed me whenever I was unexpectedly called upon to respond to the good wishes of my friends.

I returned to my bride, the little Ethel, who had been to me like a well-loved daughter, still too weak to do more than smile a welcome, but with a look of ineffable love in her innocent eyes. I talked of removing her to the lakes, and asked her if she thought she could go to-morrow.

Pressing her little hand caressingly against my cheek, she answered, —

"Yes, for I shall rest now ; you will see how well I can get in a few hours," and with her hand in mine she did sleep, taking in health with every respiration.

And I too slept until a late hour, the voice of Jerry at my door, calling "Father ! father !" rousing me to the fact that it was time for me to make my appearance at the office.

I opened the door and said, "Yes, my son ; what is it ?"

"Captain Webber is here and wants to see you," he answered.

"Tell the captain I will be with him in less than fifteen minutes," I said hurriedly, as I hastily finished dressing.

Jerry called down my reply to the captain, but still lingered around the door. Although Ethel was some years my boy's senior, yet her delicate health and quiet, girlish manner had made her seem like a young sister to him ever since she had been an inmate of our house; and no one was more solicitous for her welfare than Jerry.

I did not know — for he was an intelligent lad — what he would think of my hasty marriage, but, thanks to his military training, he had early learned to acknowledge his superiors, and accept the soldier's code, "Theirs not to reason why;" so I had no embarrassing questions to answer from him.

As I closed the door behind me he said, —

"How is Ethel?"

"She is sleeping, my son, and I hope she may be able to rise when she wakes. If she does, I mean to take her and Mrs. Gray to the lakes, with you to keep them company, and take care of them when I cannot be there."

"Good! Won't we have good times, though!" he exclaimed merrily, as he skipped away to inform Mrs. Gray.

"Good-morning, Webber," I said as I reached the sitting-room; "I hope you have not breakfasted, and can keep me company."

"Thank you, colonel, I have been to breakfast, — and allow me to extend my congratulations."

I took his proffered hand, but the blank look on his face reminded me of another lapse on my part in regard to the new relations I had assumed.

"How is Mrs. Atherton?" he asked.

"Thank you," I mustered courage to say with what I meant to be a pleased smile, "she slept well, and is sleeping still. I hope she will be much better when she wakens."

How glad I was that no one dared to ask me a question! I continued, —

"What was the shooting last night? I did not hear it, but I heard Mary the cook, and the striker discussing it while I was dressing."

Captain Webber handed me the morning "Frontiersman," without a word, simply pointing to the leading headlines :

"Terrible shooting affray in the Casino. — The Queen, a noted courtesan, Lieutenants Howland and Winchester, mixed up in it. — Lieutenant Winchester seriously wounded."

As the thought that he was the cause of my enforced marriage flashed through my brain, forgetting myself for a moment I exclaimed bitterly, —

"Pitty he does not get killed, if this is to be his line of conduct!"

"Oh colonel!" was Webber's ejaculation.

I glared at him like an infuriated beast. I should have quarrelled with him then and there — my friend of twenty years — if I had not caught sight of Jerry's



“For God’s sake, Follet, why don’t you speak?” (Page 45.)

amazed face ; then, suddenly recollecting myself, I read on in smaller type, —

“Military discipline at Deering a pitiable farce. The second escapade of a similar nature, by the same parties, within a few days.”

It was just, and I felt it to be so, saying, —

“I ought to have ordered their arrest before ; where are they ?”

“Both in their quarters, sir ; but Winchester is in a bad fix. Surgeon Ranney is with him. They did not get him home until I had come on as officer of the day.”

I knew there was nothing for it now but summary measures, and said curtly, —

“Have an order issued commanding Howland's confinement to his quarters pending investigation, and I will be over right after breakfast.”

CHAPTER IX.

AMONG the private soldiers killed in one of our frontier Indian skirmishes was Robert Marshall, of the —th regiment of cavalry. His wife survived him but a few months. During her illness she had besought Mrs. McIntyre, the wife of the general, to take her child.

Thus Elinor Marshall, when only ten years of age, became an inmate of the home of these great-hearted, generous people.

Having no children of their own, Elinor was the pet and pride of the household, as she was of the entire post. The child's eyes were a lustrous black, and sparkling with animation, her hair a mass of dark, waving curls, and her natural complexion, when not exposed to wind and sun, was almost transparent in its whiteness.

She was the personification of perfect health, restless and active from the moment of her awakening in the morning until she reluctantly retired at night.

As she grew out of childhood she showed a great love for study, and was as industrious and persevering as a pupil as she had been active and boisterous in play. She was a real child of nature, and the rough landscape of the frontier, that to the lawless meant having stepped beyond the limits of God's country, was to her a land of ever-changing beauty.

As she merged into womanhood the restlessness of childhood and the persevering studiousness of girlhood developed into strong womanly purpose to be and to do all that a woman might. The free invigorating air of the Pacific slope seemed to have filled her strong young frame with an independent thoughtfulness that bade fair to conflict with the army conservatism of her benefactors.

Although General and Mrs. McIntyre had given her every advantage possible, and had made a home for her in its truest sense, yet she knew that she really was only the child of their bounty ; and being of an independent nature, she soon settled upon her future course, and on her twentieth birthday announced her decision to study law.

It was a mystery to her friends, — and to say that she had many is no exaggeration, — how she came to select this profession of all others, and she could hardly have told herself had she been asked ; but it is probable that a solution of the problem might have been reached if any one had happened to think that she had been familiar all her life with the proceedings of courts martial and their absence of justice. She had shed many bitter tears as a child over the results of these trials, — some friend among the soldiery dismissed, or, worse still, condemned to remain and be subjected to the cut of his fellow officers and the social ostracism of the entire post.

General McIntyre had often expressed his regret at the injustice which he could not control, in his own home circle, without a thought of the young

ears which were thus absorbing material to influence her whole life-work.

General McIntyre had an external appearance of severity among his men. He was the tallest man at the post, and proportionately large. The men stood greatly in awe of him ; but in his own home he was as gentle as a child.

Mrs. McIntyre was entirely unlike her husband. She was dainty in appearance, delicate in her tastes, and so small that she could stand erect under her husband's arm. She was a devoted wife, and attentive in an unobtrusive way to the needs of the sick in her husband's command.

It caused no little consternation in the household of General McIntyre when Elinor announced her intentions ; but she won her way, as she always did ; and though to the benefactors of her childhood the whole scheme seemed unreasonable and uncalled for, yet they yielded, on condition that her studies should be pursued under the most favorable auspices, that she might do herself credit and do honor to them. It seemed altogether absurd and unwomanly, but if she must go, it was positive that the University of Michigan must be the place where she should pursue her legal studies.

It was here that she made the acquaintance of Marion Percival. They were warm friends as students, and continued their affection for each other in after-life.

In the course of time, General McIntyre was retired, and settled in Washington. Elinor accompanied her foster-parents to the East, and at once

renewed her intimacy with Marion. Through their friendship an intimacy sprang up between the two families as close as that of kindred.

When General McIntyre was stricken with pneumonia Dr. Percival was his close attendant to the last, even officiating at the last sad rites. The doctor and Marion accompanied the mourning women to their desolate home. As the doctor assisted Mrs. McIntyre from the carriage he saw beneath her feet a gold locket. Picking it up and turning it over in his hand, he thought, —

“Where in the far-away past can I have seen this before?”

Unique in shape, it was attached to a fine gold chain which had worn through, thus detaching it from the wearer's neck. It looked strangely familiar and seemed to take him back to the sister he had so dearly loved, his twin sister.

Mrs. McIntyre had not noticed the trinket, for, overwhelmed with grief at this home-coming, she had hastened up the steps. With it still in his hand, he followed the ladies into the house.

“I found this in the bottom of the carriage. Does it belong to any of you?” he asked.

“Oh, my mother's locket!” exclaimed Elinor; “how could I have dropped it!”

Doctor Percival was strangely moved, as with a husky voice he said, —

“If it was your mother's locket once, perhaps there is something inside.”

In consternation at the doctor's manner, Elinor replied, —

"Yes, it has a picture of her, taken when she was sixteen;" and touching a spring she held it up, saying, —

"Was she not a beautiful girl?"

"She was indeed at that time, but the picture does not do her justice;" and the tears chased each other slowly down the doctor's thin cheeks.

"Did you know her, Dr. Percival?" Elinor's eyes shone like stars at the thought.

"She was my only sister, my dear;" and the doctor sank into a chair overcome by his emotion.

Marion's arm circled Elinor's waist, and kissing her on the lips, she said eagerly, —

"My cousin, my own cousin, how delightful!"

Mrs. McIntyre looked as if a new calamity had befallen her; for these friends were her child's kinsmen; would they not claim her, and thus her own house be doubly desolate?

Elinor, divining her thoughts, turned from Marion's embracing arm, and flinging her own around the neck of her benefactress exclaimed with infinite tenderness, —

"Dear Mrs. McIntyre, have no fears that I shall every prove undutiful or less loving to one who has been more than a mother to me. My first duty as well as pleasure will always be the fulfilment of your wishes."

Mrs. McIntyre laid a trembling hand on Elinor's dark hair, and saying, "God bless you, my child!" she quietly withdrew, leaving the newly discovered kindred to make their explanations unrestrained and unobserved by others.

"Dr. Percival," said Elinor, "what does it all mean? Mamma never told me anything of her people, but when she was dying she gave me the locket, and told me to wear it always."

"Estelle was my twin sister," said the doctor in a trembling voice, "and she doubtless thought that she had reason for consigning us all to oblivion; but if she could have known how she was loved and mourned she would have forgiven us. It was our father's mistaken harshness which drove her from home, and bitterly he repented it. I think the unspoken sorrow killed both."

"But what did she do to merit their displeasure, dear doctor — dear uncle?"

Dr. Percival's face flushed with pleasure as he noticed the recognition of their near relationship, and answered, —

"Estelle was our idol, but her music teacher, whom we did not like, fell in love with her, and she reciprocated his love with all the intensity of a very loving nature. Our father forbade him the house, and one week from the date of his prohibitory manifesto both disappeared, and we could obtain no trace of them afterwards. Now that I think of it, his name was not Marshall, but Marsh."

"Yes, mamma told me that too, but did not explain why it was changed."

"I suppose," continued the doctor in a musing tone, "that one reason why we did not find them was because of his change of vocation. No one ever thought of looking for him in the ranks of the army."

My poor sister ; what a change for her this must have been ! ”

The doctor and Marion returned to their own home, but in less than a week Mrs. McIntyre fell a victim to the same disease that had so suddenly bereft her of her husband. Thus Elinor became an inmate of her uncle’s household.

I could not long resist the impulse to seek again the pleasant associations of the parlor where I had enjoyed the happiest hours of my life.

Marion received me with a pleased smile, and turning, presented me to her “Cousin Elinor, — Miss Marsh,” — a young lady of extremely youthful appearance, a petite, but well-rounded form, an exquisite foot and hand, and a face bright and sparkling as the highest type of dark beauty could make it.

“My cousin is,” — here she looked mischievously from one to the other, — “a lawyer.”

“A very youthful student of Blackstone, certainly,” I said.

“Not so young as I look, Colonel Atherton,” she replied. “I have long passed my quarter of a century.”

“I would not have believed it, Miss Marsh, except from your own lips,” I said gallantly.

Then turning to Marion I continued, “Miss Percival here is quite formidable in her line, and two of you, — indeed I am quite inclined to beat a retreat.”

Marion laughingly replied, “Do not, Colonel Atherton : you are too brave a soldier to strike your

colors before the enemy fires a gun; but I assure you if you find me formidable because of that intoxication of the brain which comes from shallow draughts of professional lore, I do not know how you will receive from Elinor's lips the logic of her well-stored mind."

"It certainly will be a pleasure to hear anything from the lips of Miss Marsh, from 'logic down to fishing,'" I said, with a bow in her direction.

Her pleasant, perfectly feminine voice had yet a resonant ring as she said with a smile, —

"Do not permit my cousin Marion to mislead you, Colonel Atherton. I am not a blue-stockings, nor do I perambulate the world with a volume of Blackstone as my constant attendant, to crush every unhappy mortal I meet with a 'whereas' or an 'aforesaid.' I am quite harmless I assure you."

Dr. Percival came in with a cheerful "Good-evening, colonel," and Miss Marsh soon proposed a game of whist.

"I will play one rubber," said the doctor, "then I must be excused, as I have some writing to finish to-night."

The rubber ended by the victory of the doctor and Miss Marsh, and a promise to renew the contest at some future time, and the doctor withdrew to the library.

Elinor, as she put away the cards, began to ask questions about certain army people whom we both knew, and stood for a few minutes with her hand upon the back of a chair, when a call from the library for her assistance left Marion and me for the moment

alone. An almost awkward silence fell between us, then she said, —

“How have you found things which interest you in Washington?”

“Nothing interests me here at this time, Marion, except that which brings me again to your side,” I answered with emphasis; “will you not give me an opportunity to talk with you.”

“Not to-night,” she said hastily; “we should be subject to constant interruption. My aunt has gone over to Mrs. Winchester’s, and is likely to return at any moment. I presume Leo will see her home.”

The mention of Leo’s name as a welcome visitor at Dr. Percival’s aroused my ire to such an extent that I could not control my voice, and fearing I should betray myself, I said quickly, —

“Then I will bid you good-evening!”

“It is still early in the evening,” said she; then deprecatingly added, “I hope I have not offended you.”

I caught her slender hand and raised it to my lips.

“No, Marion, no,” I said, “but I love you, and this is torture. I am in no mood to-night to be interested in anything but the subject which occupies all my thoughts. Good-night, beloved.”

I left her standing in the parlor door, and carried her sweet smile with me into my dreams.

CHAPTER X.

ON board the river steamer "First Chance," which slowly steamed into the dock at Lake Run, were many passengers, some seeking pleasure, others health; while a considerable proportion were bent on forgetting for the time the cares of business and of the household.

A party of four attracted some attention: a man of mature years, and a fine-looking middle-aged lady, who might have been taken for husband and wife, a young girl apparently, — perhaps their daughter, — and a bright-faced, manly-looking boy, who strikingly resembled the man.

There was no mistaking that the elder lady was the mother of the younger one. That look of maternal devotion could not be a counterfeit.

The bright youth, when not examining the machinery in the engine room and acting as assistant in the pilot house, was intent on calling the young girl's attention to everything that interested him on the way. She was evidently an invalid, as frail as a day-lily, and as lovely; to whom father, mother, and brother were devoted.

The gentleman, when his abstracted gaze was withdrawn from space, bestowed upon the young people a look of fatherly pride, said something gentle and tender to the young girl, who leaned against his shoulder, and relapsed again into thought.

The morning was lovely, and the broad and beautiful valley of the river stretched away into the distance, a carpet of living green. The mirage was never more peculiar, and the lad cried out, —

"Look, look, Ethel ! all the lakes are bottom-side up in the sky, — see ! one, two, three, side by side."

Ethel smiled acquiescence in all that interested Jerry, to the full extent of her feeble powers.

A large yellow omnibus carried the passengers slowly up the steep ascent from the river to the hotel on the bank of the lake, a half-mile distant. When we were placed in rooms looking out upon the chain of lakes, I turned to my sweet child-wife, and kissing her lovely brow, said, —

"Now, little one, you must be happy, and get well very fast."

She looked up into my face and smiled brightly, saying, "I am well enough now ! I am so — so happy !" and she hid her face on my arm.

"That is all right !" I said briefly, and instead of taking her in my arms and telling her of my love, I seated her coolly on the sofa, and turned to leave the room.

Her look of disappointment hurt me like a sword-thrust ; and I felt for a moment as one feels when a wounded fawn turns its pathetic eyes upon its slayer ; for I had for a moment almost hated her because she was not — Marion.

I hesitated, turned back, took her slight form in my arms, kissed her on the lips and eyes till the reproach was gone out of them, whispering, "God

bless you, my sweet wife!" and left her in a tremor of joy, promising to return soon.

Her improvement had been hourly perceptible, and though she looked extremely delicate, she seemed much as usual. When the tea hour arrived, she insisted upon joining us in the dining-room, and after tea upon the veranda. Her pretty persistence gained the day, and leaving her there with her mother, I went down to the hotel office, where I anticipated the pleasure of a cigar. My son was with me, and had already taken in all the possibilities for enjoyment in the new residence.

"Father!" he exclaimed eagerly.

"Yes, my boy, what is it?"

"Can you help me make a boat to-morrow to sail on the edge of the lake?"

"I suppose so, but I think we can find a little row-boat which it will not be difficult for you to handle."

"Oh, how nice! and can — Ethel — go out rowing with me?"

He spoke her name with a little catch of the breath, and looked curiously in my face for a moment.

It had not occurred to me before that Ethel's relations were changed towards my son, but it now flashed upon me that the boy himself had seen that the old familiar appellation was not quite suitable for his father's wife.

What should I say? Jerry saved me the trouble by looking anxiously in my face and saying, —

"What shall I call her, father?"

"What did you call your own mother, my son?" I asked.

"Mamma," he said with a tender intonation.

"Then call her mother," I said.

"Mother! — little mother!" I heard him murmur in a low tone of voice as he turned and walked away.

As I entered the office I heard some one repeat my name, and turning, was confronted with a telegraphic message from Major Follet.

"The department commander sends telegraphic order directing Colonel Atherton to send a detachment of a commissioned officer and twelve men to report to commanding officer at the Cannon Ball Butte Cantonment for duty along the line of the railroad to protect working parties from Indians."

This compelled me to return immediately to the post. The boat had gone, and there was no alternative but to drive to the railway station, a mile distant, to take the train.

I had but an hour's time, so I sent Jerry with the telegram to Mrs. Atherton, telegraphed to Follet, "I will return by eight o'clock train," and drove directly to the station.

Jerry had rushed up stairs with the despatch, threw it into his mother's lap, and, boy-like, slid down the balustrade, when with a hop, skip, and jump, he was beside me, determined to see me off. He called my attention to the peculiarity of the sky above us. The heavens looked as if they might be divided by a bridge. On one side of this dividing line the sky was a beautiful blue, thickly studded

with stars ; the other looked like drifts upon drifts of snow, upon which the full moon, now slowly rising, cast a silvery shimmering light.

After I was seated on the train a strange mood took possession of me. It seemed to me that the sky as it was to-night symbolized my own future life. To my wife I must be without spot or blemish, clear as the star-lighted heavens. The other side, — ah that it might be as pure as the snow-drifts, though hidden from her sight !

I wondered if it would seem a very long journey to the end of a life so suddenly bereft of brightness and hope !

I asked myself, Why should I have sacrificed my life to save hers ? Could she reap anything but disappointment in the end ?

I had given her my hand and the protection of my name, which was all I had to give. She was sure to learn, sooner or later, that the one charm without which all others are valueless was only a make-believe, and a poor one at that.

I started in my seat as I asked myself, What will the awakening be to her when it comes ?

It seemed to me before the termination of that hour's ride that I should go mad with thinking.

The post reached, I went directly from the train to the office, glad to escape myself in the activity of garrison duties. The adjutant gave me the roll of second lieutenants in their order as to detail duty. Grant Stuart stood at the head of the list. I accordingly detailed him, with two men, commissioned officers, and ten privates, to report on duty at Can-

non Ball Butte Cantonment, with orders to start immediately after guard-mount in the morning. The distance was fifty miles, one half of it beyond the terminus of the railroad.

Grant Stuart was a slight-built young man, with an open boyish face, laughing gray eyes, and brown wavy hair. He was a New York city bred boy, fresh from Princeton, brimming over with spirits, and was the life of the regiment.

He was appointed from civil life, and being a dexterous billiard-player, full of all such pranks as college boys delight in, he was a favorite from the first with his comrades.

His accomplishments rendered him no less popular in social circles.

When it became known that Lieutenant Stuart was detailed to command the detachment ordered to the cantonment, the social circles of the garrison were in mourning. The ladies had congregated at Adjutant Dowd's to obtain early information of the the victims selected for this forlorn business.

An orderly was the first to bring the news.

"Lieutenant Stuart!" exclaimed half a dozen voices in the same breath; "that is too bad!"

"I think," said Mrs. Dowd, "that the colonel has certainly studied this time to be spiteful towards the garrison."

It was not that Mrs. Dowd cared anything for the lieutenant, for she made it a religious principle to dislike every one whom Ella admired, and Grant Stuart was as great a favorite with Ella Dowd as he was with the older ladies; but Mrs. Dowd must say

something disagreeable, or she would not have been Mrs. Dowd.

"Of course," said Mrs. Heath, "these things go by rotation, but the colonel would not violate any statute by passing over one and taking the next on the list. We shall feel quite undone without Stuart at our parties."

Ella Dowd was too unhappy for words, and only wished that she could leave the room without being noticed.

There was no chance to prolong the discussion, for Lieutenant Stuart came bounding in with his usual buoyant step, to say good-by to Ella, and to his utter dismay was confronted by a parlor-full of ladies.

Always equal to the occasion, he doffed his cap and said, —

"Ladies, I have come for your congratulations and blessings."

"Congratulations indeed!" said Mrs. Heath; "we are all in mourning."

"Alas! where is your patriotism, ladies? Not willing to help build railroads! Do you always want to travel by ambulance overland? It is a very exclusive mode of travel, I grant, but too slow for the nineteenth century."

"Then you are really going, Lieutenant Stuart?"

"Truly, and must say good-night and good-by to all who are not to be present at guard-mount. I have to pack to-night for a three months' campaign."

Shaking hands with the ladies, he turned quickly

towards Ella, and interposing himself between her tear-filled eyes and the dozen curious ones on the other side of the room, said in a low voice, —

“Good-by, my little sweetheart, and do not forget me !”

Ella could only shake her curly head and look her good-by, for she dared not trust her voice to speak, and with one long look into her eyes he turned and left the room. Luckily the ladies, intent on seeing the last of him, moved towards the door, giving Ella a chance to escape by a communicating room in the rear.

“After the detachment was designated I sent the adjutant for Major Follet. He was with me in less than ten minutes, and his face wore a most dejected expression.

“What is the result of to-day’s investigations, Follet ?” I asked abruptly.

“There is some great mystery about it, colonel, or rather about Lieutenant Winchester. He is not himself, from some cause.”

“I do not understand what it can be,” I said indifferently.

“Nor do I, sir ; but when he returned from the Indian scare, Howland met him, and from what I can learn, which is not much, Howland gave him the garrison news, and he rushed to his quarters with the manner of a madman. Howland must have followed him soon, and I suppose they rowed out into the river with muffled oars, to escape the guard.”

“Is that all ?” I questioned as he hesitated.

“No, sir ; but the remaining facts are substantially

those stated in the 'Frontiersman,' which I showed you yesterday morning."

I dropped my head thoughtfully on my hand for a moment, then noticing that Follet still lingered, I said, —

"I can see nothing for them but trial by court-martial."

"It is an awful bad piece of business, sir," he answered. "Can I be of any further service?"

"I think not, Follet, to-night; you may go."

I closed the door after his departure, and set about the most uncomfortable business that can fall to the hands of a commanding officer. I drew up charges against each of the lieutenants, Howland and Winchester, "absence without leave, and conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman," with the necessary specifications; and instructed the adjutant to forward them to the department commander by the first mail.

I then went to my quarters with a heavy heart, unlike anything but the joyous bridegroom of a few short hours.

CHAPTER XI.

AS early as my pride and sense of propriety would allow, I presented myself again at Dr. Percival's. Marion welcomed me with a cordial "good-evening." I bent to kiss her as I had done in the olden time, but she hastily drew back, and looking up into my face with a pleasant smile, said kindly, but decidedly, —

"You will excuse me, if you please."

A blow could not have astonished me more. I took the proffered chair, but I was thoroughly unmanned. As quickly as I could rally my scattered senses, I said, —

"Marion, what does this mean?"

"We gain some wisdom with experience," she replied, "or experience would be vain."

While her look and voice were extremely friendly, there was no mistaking her decision of manner, which said more plainly than words could have done, that the policy she had marked out for herself in her intercourse with me was to maintain a certain distance between us which I might not overstep.

I fumed inwardly, and fidgeted outwardly, as I asked, —

"What interpretation am I to put upon the language of your speaking eyes, which seem to smile a welcome when I come?"

"That you are very welcome," she quickly replied.

"And can you not trust the man who offers you his whole heart and begs you to become his wife, to the extent of a kiss?" I interrogated reproachfully.

"Not even to the extent of one kiss," she said with a smile, "unless it shall become his right to take it as my chosen husband. You must not expect it," she added; "then you will not have the pain of disappointment."

I made no answer, for I was puzzled by her manner, and felt the repulse seriously. She sat looking thoughtfully at the glowing fire, and I, like a thwarted school-boy, actually sulked in my chair.

At last she said, "Tell me something about your daughter."

The matter-of-fact tone of her voice restored me to myself as nothing else could, and, taking her cue, I answered in the same tone, —

"You know that we fitted up a cosey home for them in New York, and the idol of my life is the queen of her husband's home and heart. If ever perfect happiness reigned in any home, it does in theirs."

"And the baby?" she said inquiringly.

"He is the image of my mother," I replied; "a bright, joyous, healthy creature, but," — my troubled expression must have startled her, for she said quickly, —

"What is it, Hugh?"

Her sympathetic voice touched me, as I continued, —

"Ruth has never been strong since little Hugh came." Here I broke down utterly.

"It is not well to borrow trouble," she said. "As a woman and a physician I can assure you that these cases of weakness are quite common."

"I know, Marion, the doctor says there is no cause for alarm, but she is so tired and listless all the time that, after seeing Ethel fade away from me, I cannot help feeling anxious for my child. Her face is transparent in its pallor, and it seems to me she is slowly slipping away from earth." My voice had sunk to a husky whisper, and Marion's voice trembled as she said softly, —

"Be brave, my friend, and hope for the best. She has your physical constitution, and that is certainly in her favor."

"I hope you may be correct in your favorable view of the case," I said gloomily, "but my fears are not altogether groundless, for she is wholly unlike my merry Ruth."

I noticed the slight start that Marion could not wholly repress, as I alluded to Ethel, and I said to myself, "Hugh Atherton, there is need of patient waiting here before the wounds made by your treachery are healed."

Marion's allusion to my daughter, and the sad thought which followed, reminded me that I had never asked her anything about the fate of little Bessie.

"Marion, what became of Bessy Brooks?" I asked. "Did she die? I dreamed that she did."

"No," she answered; "but she came so near it

that we almost heard the rustle of the angel's wings. Her recovery at all seems a miracle of human skill, and her convalescence will be slow and tedious."

"She must have a marvellous constitution as well as a good physician," I said.

"Dr. Henderson has been more than that," she continued. "When we first discovered how very ill she was I went to his office and told him as much of their history as I gave you that evening on our way over there. He said, 'They are strangers to me, but I will do the best I can for them. The poor little creature looked so pitifully at me with her great brown eyes, in her delirium, that I feel drawn towards her, and some way responsible for her.' His kind face and manifest feeling made me feel at once that she was in good hands. I explained to him that I divided my pocket-money with them when they moved, and had helped them since, until it was absolutely out of my power to render them any more substantial aid just at present, and that they ought not to be allowed to suffer in a land of plenty; ending by asking him if there was not some way to induce the Associate Charities to make them a loan.

"'What church do they attend?' he asked. I did not even know.

"'The churches here take care of such cases,' he continued, 'and I will make some inquiries when I go there to-morrow. We will see what can be done.'

"From this time he became their benefactor and friend, ascertained their church and induced the

pastor to call, and he at once presented the case to the church. They took up a collection, sent a trained nurse, and made every needed provision for their comfort."

"That was genuine Christianity," I interrupted.

"It was," she resumed; "and Dr. Henderson has been doctor, friend, banker, — everything to them."

"That was rather exceptional, I think, in a physician," said I.

"It was true disinterested philanthropy," she answered, "which must find its reward in a better world than this, — but I beg your pardon for talking all this time about strangers."

"I have been greatly interested, as I must be in anything that interests you," I said; and as I noticed the grateful look in her upraised eyes, I took courage, and added, "I came to talk to you of our future, Marion."

She turned to me with a little joyous ripple in her voice, and answered, "The present has enough of joy for me, without troubling about the future at present."

"Marion," I continued, "why will you, who have always been the soul of sincerity, trifle with me now? I am in deadly earnest."

She feigned a look of astonishment; I am sure it was feigned, for there was a humorous twinkle in her eyes which showed that she was determined to turn everything I said into a cause for merriment; in short, I knew that she meant to give me no opportunity for serious conversation.

I did not propose to be baffled, however, and said, "Marion," — I think there must have been some pathos in my voice, for her whole expression seemed to change, as if she was beginning to feel just a little sorry for me, — "you met me on my arrival with unspoken but full forgiveness written on your face : why are you so changed?"

"I am not," she said. "I met you as I felt and still feel. You did not expect me to cherish malice towards you, did you?"

Her gentle words and manner completed my discomfiture, and there came upon me such an overwhelming sense of all the wrong I had done her that I said, —

"Marion, I never meant to hurt you : will you not forgive me?"

"I believe you," she answered, "and have never doubted that."

"You do not know half the sin I have been guilty of towards you," I said humbly.

"I know you have sinned against yourself," was the gentle answer.

Determined to make a clean breast of it, I continued, —

"I cursed you when I found that you had betrayed me to your friends, for somehow, before that, it had seemed to me that all would be ultimately right between us. I could not comprehend that the barrier I had raised myself was final ; but when I learned that your friends had investigated the cause of my marriage I was speechless with rage towards you, them, my wife, myself, and all the world."

For an instant her bright eyes flashed, and throwing her head back defiantly, she said, —

"Colonel Atherton, has a man any right to strike a woman down, and then complain if she cries out?"

"No right, none," I answered; "but, Marion, it drew my bonds closer, and set me so far away from you that I fairly gnashed my teeth in my helpless agony."

She turned upon me a look of surprised inquiry, to which I replied, —

"The letters were all given to me; you may imagine the rest."

"Is it possible?" she said. "I did not suppose that any army officer would disclose the contents of a confidential letter of inquiry."

"Army officers are much like other people in that respect, I fear," said I.

She looked at me a moment with unseeing eyes, and then said slowly, —

"How strange it all seems! It is true, then, Hugh Atherton, that mind can act on mind though miles may intervene; for I felt it all, — all your sorrow, sin, shame, and desperation. I had passed a pleasant evening with friends, and they were just about to leave when a strange but powerful influence seemed to paralyze every nerve of my being. With a strong effort of the will I threw it off until my friends had taken their departure, when, as I paced restlessly up and down the parlor, a voice seemed to say to me, 'Marion! Marion! It is all over!'

"I thought you dead; I thought, — God knows what frenzied thoughts chased each other through

my brain, and with rebellious bitterness I cried, 'How can I bear it!' I believed then, and I believe now, that our souls met in that bitter hour. To prove it to you, here is the date in the little memorandum which I always carry;" and she drew from her pocket a little Russia-leather book, to which a pencil was attached, and turning its pages, pointed to a date under which she had written, —

"Strange psychological experience."

A dizziness seized me, and I involuntarily clutched the chair beside me, for I felt an almost superstitious fear that the date was identical with one in my own pocket. It was; and I had said those very words.

"Marion," I said, "you cannot doubt now that God intended us for each other, unworthy as I am of your love; but I have not told you all. I was filled with the most diabolical intentions towards you, and towards every one with whom I came in contact. I sought to deceive my wife with the most specious deceptions. I persecuted my brother officers with all the evil machinations I could devise; it was not safe for friend or foe to come in my way."

"I had a premonition of that too," she said; "an unexplainable feeling that you were going wrong some way, when the 'Army and Navy Journal' fell into my hands, containing an account of the trial of Lieutenant Winchester. Enough was said to convince me that you had something to do with it, and it showed a vindictiveness of spirit so foreign to your nature as I knew you that I exclaimed, as did he of old, 'He knows not what he does!'

"I have been in army circles," she continued, "long enough to understand that trial by court-martial is often only another name for jealousy and spite, and that many a brave young life is ruined by the seeming administration of justice."

Marion's narration of these singular phenomena had deeply affected me ; but, thinking to change the current of thought, I said playfully, —

"You would be an uncomfortable monitor to have about. A fellow would have to walk straight or be found out all the time."

"If the fellow happened to be Hugh Atherton, I think he would, for I carry no divining rod as to other people's purposes ; and besides, you could not look me in the face if you had been in mischief without betraying yourself," she said with a laugh.

I glanced at the little clock on the mantel, and noticing the lateness of the hour, said to myself, "This will never do ; I must know whether she will ever consent to be my wife, — that she loves me, I know," — and I said, —

"Marion, have I alienated your affections entirely by my base conduct, or will you generously believe that I sincerely regret my most unhappy past?"

She laid her kind hand on my arm, and answered, —

"Hugh, there is nothing more useless than time spent in dwelling upon a past of barren regrets. Put it all behind you, and turn manfully to a future which you may, if you will, make noble and useful. With God's help you might make for yourself a future which would more than atone for your past."

More than half your life has gone for naught, and you have no time to waste in vain retrospect."

Her candid voice and earnest manner made me feel more than ever that she alone was my good angel, and I exclaimed eagerly, —

"Marion, it is for you to decide. My future is wholly in your hands. All that your speaking eyes can say is just as trustful as of old; but in manner you keep me at a distance. I cannot comprehend you, yet I believe you love me."

Her face became the saddest I had ever seen it as she replied slowly and hesitatingly, —

"I am almost compelled to confess that my life will be empty and my future hopeless when you are entirely gone out of it, Hugh!"

I moved towards her, but she made an almost imperceptible gesture which forbade my nearer approach.

"Marion!" I cried, "how can you say that to me, and still hold me at such a distance that I almost even dread to take your hand, fearing a repulse?"

"And have you forgotten our former conversation?" she asked.

"It is indelibly fixed upon my mind," I said. "It has cost me such unspeakable pain that I am not likely to forget it very soon."

"And do you think," she continued, "that any sane woman would dare to place herself in hands which she could not trust, to guard her life and hold her most sacred affections?"

"Marion," I said, extending both hands towards her, "trust me with the priceless gift; I will not fail

you. I have never known what love was until I knew you. You have taught me that an emotional susceptibility to woman's physical attractions is not love."

"I have no doubt that you think so now, while you are with me," she said, "but what guarantee have I that if I became your wife and fulfilled my part of the marital contract in letter and spirit, that your love for me would continue to be the supreme love of your life?"

Hurt as I was by her distrust of me, I still pleaded my own cause with dogged persistency, and said, —

"Marion, I do not need to tell you, what I first learned from you, that love which is only emotional is soon sated with possession, but love which is founded upon esteem must be unchangeable. The emotional element may give power, but only respect and affection can render it permanent."

I thought she was about to yield, but at that moment the card of Mrs. Winchester was brought in, and I took my leave, feeling baffled and disappointed.

CHAPTER XII.

AT an early hour next day the garrison was in a state of the most intense agitation. When a sergeant came around to headquarters with the sick-book, directions were given him to transfer Lieutenant Winchester from the list of "present, but unable to do duty," to "in arrest."

The two lieutenants in arrest, and Lieutenant Stuart detailed to leave that morning, deprived the social circle of three of its most popular young men. This most serious infringement upon social prerogatives, and the sole topic of conversation for many hours, was deplored as a special calamity.

Ella Dowd was at guard-mount, a most touching picture of dejection. The detail were to take the early train, and the shriek of the whistle far out in the valley was the signal for leave-takings, and suddenly broke up the group who were chatting in the square.

Stuart soon espied Ella, and, going quickly towards her, doffed his cap, exchanged a few words, and turning with a bow, hurried towards the station.

I returned to Lake Run by the same train, glad to have the diversion on the return trip which the presence of the detail afforded me. Jerry was wild with delight that I had hurried back so soon. Ethel, too, appreciated my haste, and attributed it to a husband's devotion to his young wife, instead of to the truth,

that I was not content anywhere except in constant action, and impatient of everything that gave me time for thought.

Of the week which followed, what need to tell, save that the ill-fated awakening I had so much dreaded came to Ethel?

She seemed instinctively to divine the true cause of my unrest and distraction of manner. One night after we had retired to our room, she timidly laid her hand on my shoulder, and I drew her to a seat on my knee. She was paler than usual, and her face wore a look of unsatisfied longing, which pierced me through and through.

"What is it, my love?" I asked her tenderly, but with a terrible foreboding at my heart that she had discovered my secret.

In a low voice she said, "I know I am nothing but a weak, useless little girl, but I am strong in my love for you."

She paused for a moment, then with a quivering indrawn breath continued, —

"Hugh! my heart's true love! is there anything, — *anything* that I can do to win your love?"

I was inexpressibly touched by her words and tone; she had never called me "Hugh" before, and the tenderness of her voice as she spoke the name was like a benediction.

I drew my strong protecting arm more closely around her and said gravely, "Ethel, what could put such an idea into your head? Have I neglected you in anything, that you can so seriously accuse me?"

"Oh, no, no!" she exclaimed passionately; "you

are very good to me, my husband, but I can feel that I have no hold upon your heart, and I am so hungry for that, so very hungry!" And she wrung her hands in silent appealing agony.

I took the small hands in mine and kissed them into quiet, then said, —

"I have loved you, little one, since I first saw your face, and all these fancies are the offspring of weakness. You are not strong, or you could not conceive anything so absurd as to doubt my love for you."

She raised her violet eyes, and slowly shaking her head replied, —

"I know you love me, but it is the sort of love you give to Ruth — not as I love you."

I must have frowned in my perplexity as to how I was to meet and parry such awful truths, for still with her eyes on my face she added quickly, —

"Forgive me, dear, have I offended you?"

"I am only grieved," I answered sadly; and my heart went out to the poor young thing in pitying tenderness, while at the same time I was appalled at the sight of the hopeless, hapless fate I had brought upon her and myself.

"It has come," I thought; "but what will the end be?" I could see nothing before me but a life of wicked deception for myself, or a broken heart for her.

She seemed deeply to regret having grieved me, and again begged my forgiveness. Leaning her head on my shoulder, she said wearily, —

"I will not speak of it again, dear Hugh; I must be ill, I think."

I kissed her soft cheek, and pressed her pityingly to my heart, — my frail child-wife !

The next morning two telegrams were handed me in the office at the same time. Both were from Deering. One stated that Sergeant Sloan had deserted, taking one of the best horses in the garrison ; the other that an order had been issued from headquarters calling a court martial for the trial of Lieutenants Howland and Winchester, and asking me to suggest the men of whom it should be composed. This made it necessary for me to return to the post by the evening train. I showed Ethel only the telegram concerning the desertion. I parted with my wife, going through all the conventional forms of a loving leave-taking ; but I knew that she felt the lack of that lingering touch and kiss which the devoted husband gives to the beloved wife, and to save my soul I could not feign that warmth of affection which her heart craved. My own heart ached for her.

Once on board the train, I seemed to myself transformed into a different person. The night was exceedingly clear and bright, — so clear that one could almost have read ordinary print by the light of the moon. I am sure that I could have read my paper by the head-lines without any difficulty. As I looked out on the moon-lighted earth, a fiend seemed to take possession of me. My feelings towards Winchester seemed to centre and culminate in a feeling of exultation that at last it would be comparatively in my power to wreak dire vengeance on the man who had compelled me to wreck my life in this unfortunate marriage.

I believed him to be the sole cause of all my sorrows ; and I believed, too, that the mistaken idea of protecting Ethel's honor by this unhappy union would cost her her life, for her pale reproachful face haunted me like a spectre.

Arriving at the post, I despatched more parties in every direction to hunt down the deserter. My next work was to draw up a list of available men for the members of the court, and forward the same to headquarters.

The court was speedily convened. Among its members were five majors and two captains, — seven officers in a court of eleven, nearly all of them superior officers and distinguished graduates, men fitted by education and experience to weigh testimony and to administer justice.

Howland was a genial society man, and the usual garrison gossip was largely in his favor. As the trial progressed, public sentiment grew in favor of the accused. He pleaded guilty, and it was very clear to my mind that the sentence of the court would not be dismissal.

The more favorable the prospect grew for Howland, the more determined I became that Winchester should be convicted. I must have been mad in those days.

While the fiend within me suggested that I might find other occupation for some of the present court, as an excuse to call a second one for the trial of Winchester, a circumstance occurred which seemed likely to frustrate all my diabolical schemes for Winchester's overthrow.

I was shaving one morning, when I again heard loud talking in the direction of the woodyard, and the shrill voice of Mary, the cook, talking to the striker.

"Shure, an' I guess it's justhice. Mr. Lootinent Winchester will git off now that Jedge Percival hez offered to befrind him. Yez o't to be 'shamed ov yerself fer turnin' yer back agin a nice young feller in trubble."

"I never did him any harm that you should larrup me after that fashion," answered the sulky voice of the striker; "the colonel is dead-set ag'in' Winchester, an' I guess I ain't fool enough to turn ag'in' my master."

"The colonel indade ! He isn't hisself at all at all enny more ; but Jedge Percival, I've ben told, knows more then all the jedge advocates an' officers in the hull army. May the Lord bliss him an' the saints presarve him !"

I soon found that this was the general opinion in regard to Judge Percival's ability. He was the most distinguished lawyer in all the Rocky Mountain country. He was the unswerving foe of evil-doers, and the avowed champion of everything good and noble. He lived in a distant city where I seldom had occasion to go, and I had never met him ; but, judging from his distinguished reputation, I knew that his defense of Winchester's case boded no good to my plans for the lieutenant's downfall. I feared that a court of wise and experienced men would never dismiss him in face of such a plea as Judge Percival would make.

While all were anticipating the coming of Judge Percival to defend Winchester, the trial of Lieutenant Howland was progressing, and I was quietly manœuvring for the ordering of a second court to try Winchester.

Howland was found guilty and sentenced to confinement to the limits of his post for four months, forfeiting one half of his pay for the same time, and sustaining the loss of two files.

The court which tried Howland adjourned on February 15, to meet at the call of the President.

This court was called for the specific purpose of trying the two lieutenants, and upon the specious plea that some of the members would be detailed elsewhere upon the termination of Howland's trial, the ordering of a second court for the trial of Winchester was rendered necessary.

The order for the new court was issued from headquarters at once. It was a stupid blunder that the court which tried Howland was not dissolved.

I ground my teeth with rage that they had thus left the way open for imputing to some one a "packed" second court, if it should ever be questioned. The record evidence would undoubtedly show that there were really two courts in existence at the same time for the trial of Winchester.

To make doubly sure of Winchester's conviction, the proceedings of the court in Howland's case were retained at the post, instead of being forwarded to department headquarters as required by law.

CHAPTER XIII.

DURING the session of the court which tried Howland, on the 25th of January, the second court was ordered for the trial of Lieutenant Winchester.

This court had but two graduated officers, and they were the juniors of the court. The majority were not men fitted either by education or by experience to weigh testimony in the light of judicial justice, nor to be moved by Judge Percival's personal magnetism or cultured eloquence.

The time for which I had so carefully planned arrived. The court convened, and the members took their seats in the order of their rank. The president sat at the head of the table, and the officers on his right and left, alternately, according to rank.

The judge advocate sat at the foot of the table. A table and chairs were provided for Winchester and Judge Percival at the right of the judge advocate, and chairs for the witnesses at his left.

No challenges being given, the judge advocate said, "The court will receive the oath."

The members all arose to their feet and raised their right hands.

"You," said the judge advocate, calling the name of each member of the court, "do swear that you will well and truly try and determine, according to evidence, the matter now before you, between the

United States of America and the prisoner to be tried, and that you will duly administer justice without partiality, favor, or affection, according to the provisions of the rules and articles for the government of the armies of the United States; and if any doubts should arise not explained by said articles, then according to your conscience, your understanding, and the custom of war in like cases; and you do further swear that you will not divulge the sentence of the court until it shall be published by the proper authority; neither will you disclose or discover the vote or opinion of any particular member of the court martial, unless required to give evidence thereof as a witness by a court of justice in due course of law. So help you God!"

"I do," responded all.

The president of the court then administered this oath to the judge advocate:—

"You," calling the judge advocate by name, "do swear that you will not disclose or discover the vote or opinion of any particular member of the court martial, unless required to give evidence thereof as a witness by a court of justice in due course of law, nor divulge the sentence of the court to any one but the proper authority, until it shall be duly disclosed by the same. So help you God!"

"I do," responded the judge advocate.

Winchester was then requested to stand, and the judge advocate read to him the following charges and specifications:—

"Charge I. Absence without leave, to the prejudice of good order and military discipline.

"Specification 1st. In this, that you, Lieutenant Leopold Winchester, —th Infantry, did absent yourself from your post and station without permission from your commanding officer, from 10 o'clock of the evening of —, 18—, till 9.15 o'clock the following morning.

"Specification 2d. In this, that you, Lieutenant Leopold Winchester, did without right or authority leave your post and station, and visit Blackwood City, Montana. This at Fort Deering, Montana, the evening of —, 18—.

"Charge II. Conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman.

"Specification 1st. In this, that you, Lieutenant Leopold Winchester, —th Infantry, being stationed at the post of Fort Deering, Montana, did, during the month of —, 18—, by your publicly known intimacy in Blackwood City with a courtesan of said city known as 'the Queen,' give occasion for your name to be published in scandalous and disgraceful connection with that of the said woman, in the 'Frontiersman,' a widely circulated daily newspaper, published and issued at Blackwood City, Montana, in an article which appeared in that paper on the morning of —, 18—, and which was in part as follows :—

"'"The Queen," the attractive *danseuse* of the Casino, barely escaped murder this morning at the hands of her dashing lover, the handsome young lieutenant of Fort Deering, Leopold Winchester. The Queen's ravishing beauty had enthralled an endless train of admirers, whom she flattered and



"Live for me, sweet one!" (Page 57.)

fooled by turns ; but it at last became evident that she had succumbed to the fascinations of the elegant lieutenant, and mingled with her fierce devotion was a jealous tyranny which would brook no negligence on his part ; and it is supposed that when under the influence of liquor, a jealous quarrel arose, which ended in the shooting and wounding of the lieutenant.'

"Specification 2d. In this, that you, Lieutenant Leopold Winchester, —th Infantry, being well known in Blackwood City, Montana, as an officer of the army, did openly frequent a notorious den of infamy, and to such an extent as to render yourself the subject of disgraceful and scandalous gossip by the public, to the discredit and injury of the service. This at Blackwood City, Montana, during the month of —, 18—.

"Specification 3d. In this, that you, Lieutenant Leopold Winchester, —th Infantry, in company with Lieutenant Howland, —th Infantry, did take as guests to Starlight's restaurant in Blackwood City, Montana, 'the Queen,' of Blackwood City, Montana, and one 'Gipsey,' of Blackwood City, Montana, both women of ill-repute, and did then and there dine and drink liquor with them, you, the said Lieutenant Winchester, being well known as an officer of the army to the people of the said restaurant, by whom the reputation and character of the said women were also known. This at Blackwood City, Montana, on the night of —, 18—."

"You have heard the charges and specifications

preferred against you : how say you to the first specification to the first charge ? ”

“ Guilty ! except the time. ”

“ What to the second specification to the first charge ? ”

“ Guilty. ”

“ How say you to the first charge ? ”

“ Guilty. ”

“ How say you to the first specification to the second charge ? ”

“ Not guilty. ”

“ How say you to the second specification to the second charge ? ”

“ Not guilty. ”

“ How say you to the third specification to the second charge ? ”

“ Not guilty. ”

“ How say you to the second charge ? ”

“ Not guilty. ”

The first witness called and sworn was Captain Webber, who was officer of the day at the time the lieutenants returned from Blackwood City.

He testified substantially to the above facts.

Lieutenant Howland was next called by the government, sworn, and examined as follows by the judge advocate : —

“ Mr. Howland, will you state to the court what position you occupy in the military service of the United States ? ”

“ I hold a position as second lieutenant in the regular army. ”

“ At what time, Lieutenant Howland, on the even-

ing of —, did you and the accused leave Fort Deering for Blackwood City?"

"I did not leave the post on the evening in question with the purpose of visiting Blackwood City that evening. As to the time of leaving, I have no very definite idea. As to Lieutenant Winchester in this connection, I beg the court will excuse me from answering any questions, inasmuch as Lieutenant Winchester had requested me to act as his counsel in this case before Judge Percival had proffered his assistance. I have held various conversations on this subject with the accused in the capacity of counsel. All such communications are privileged by the laws which govern courts like this. I therefore repeat my request, — that I be excused from further testimony in this case."

Judge Percival moved that "the witness be discharged from further service in this court."

The room was then cleared, and the court proceeded to deliberate with closed doors. After some time the doors were reopened, and the judge advocate declared the witness excused; whereupon, the court adjourned to eleven o'clock the next morning.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE court met pursuant to adjournment. William Brown was called by the government, sworn, and examined by the judge advocate as follows : —

“William Brown, will you state to the court your occupation?”

“I am the proprietor of the Casino at Blackwood City.”

“Will you state the nature and character of your business?”

“I keep a first-class amusement house for the evening entertainment of my patrons. We furnish the best music in the dancing-hall, and all the appointments of the billiard-hall and saloon are of the same order.”

“Did you have as a special attraction at the Casino on the evening of —— a ballet dancer known as ‘the Queen?’”

“The Queen was with us about that time, and drew well.”

“Did you ever see the accused at the Casino while the Queen was the belle of the establishment?”

“I may have seen him there at that time. I could not say certainly that I did. A great many gentlemen visited the Casino at that time. He might have been among them, but I cannot swear that he was.”

"At what time did the Queen close her engagement with you?"

"At about ——. I only employed her from week to week."

"Where did she go from Blackwood City?"

"I have no knowledge whatever as to that."

Mr. Brown was then handed a copy of the "Frontiersman" containing the account of the shooting affray.

The judge advocate continued the examination of the witness.

"Mr. Brown, will you state what you know in regard to the shooting affray published there as having occurred at your establishment on the night therein referred to?"

"I know nothing about it whatever, sir; I keep an orderly and respectable establishment. My patrons are respectable people, and I harbor no roughs or rowdies."

The accused, by his counsel, Judge Percival, then examined the witness as follows:—

"Will you state to the court, Mr. Brown, the general character and social standing of the men who spent their evenings at the Casino during your engagement with the ballet dancer known as 'the Queen'?"

"So far as my knowledge goes, obtained through five years' experience in the Casino, they were the most prominent young business and professional men of Blackwood City, and many officers from Fort Deering."

We will not weary the patience of the reader with

further details of the testimony for the government in this trial, which dragged its "slow length along" through thirty days. It is sufficient to say that through the testimony of the "Gipsey," who had reigned supreme at the Casino before the advent of the Queen, it was fairly deducible that the Gipsey's jealousy had led her to drug the liquor given to Winchester on that evening. He had started to escort the Queen to her lodgings, but, drugged and befogged as he was, an altercation ensued between them, and resulted in the shooting affray which left Winchester wounded and disgraced.

The sensational newspaper item was made up between the reporter and the Gipsey, the latter thus hoping to regain her supremacy at the Casino.

The scheme must have been a successful one, as the Queen suddenly disappeared, and all attempts to gain any clue to her whereabouts were futile.

The other witnesses were a hack driver, a restaurant keeper, and a restaurant cook. It was also in evidence that a species of blackmail was attempted, as Winchester was informed that the item would not be published if he had any "money to put up."

The examination for the government being concluded, the accused, through his counsel, Judge Percival, made his defence as follows : —

"May it please the court : The gravity of the second charge against the accused in this case, the serious and terrible consequences to him and to those who are near and dear to him resulting from an adverse finding, justify me in a few preliminary remarks.

"I am well aware that, because I am counsel for the accused, everything that I may say or advance in his behalf is likely to be estimated as the views of one who is interested in his own utterances; but I beg this court, as far as possible, to ignore the unimportant individual who addresses it, and to give to the suggestions he shall make and the opinions he shall present, such just consideration as they may merit in themselves.

"This is a court of justice, authorized by the Constitution of the United States, and created by an act of Congress for the administration of justice in the armies of the nation. It is part of the judicial machinery of a great government, limited in its powers to persons in the army of the United States and connected therewith, and to specific subjects matter designated by Congress in its enactments.

"It is therefore a court of limited and special jurisdiction, and has power to determine and do those things only which are specifically conferred upon it; but it is a court of justice,—a place, defined by Blackstone, 'where justice is judicially determined.'

"The accused is here, therefore, to be tried judicially according to the well-known rules which the wisdom of centuries has devised for the well-being of government.

"You are to judge him, too, not only in strict accord with these rules and safeguards, but as men, conscious of the few perfections and the many infirmities of human nature. None of us are gods, and in judging each other we cannot separate our judicial functions from our human natures.

"A union of both heart and judgment is therefore necessary in every adjudication, because God never created a man or woman whose action and judgment in every walk of life were not controlled to some extent by the dictates of a kind heart.

"It is with these feelings, then, that we come to judge the accused judicially. I therefore invite the attention of the court, first, to the grand principle which underlies every trial, that the accused is presumed innocent until his guilt is made to appear *by the evidence*.

"The oath of this honorable court is, that they will try him only by the evidence, that they will not try him by their suspicions, by their surmises, by their guesses, by their inferences, by what might be natural to do or not to do under given circumstances ; but, in the language of the oath, you 'will truly try according to the evidence.'

"It is an axiom in judicial proceedings, that the proof which is the result of the evidence must establish that which is alleged, or it stands unproved.

"Applying, then, these principles to the first specification of the second charge, — is the accused guilty by the evidence? — is there any proof that he did during the month of —, by his publicly known intimacy in Blackwood City with a woman of ill-repute, give occasion for his name to be published in scandalous and disgraceful connection with hers in the 'Frontiersman'?

The first item in this specification is that his intimacy was publicly known.

"I contend that there is not one scintilla of proof of *intimacy*. This word is defined by Webster, 'close familiarity.' The mere fact that the accused was twice in his life in the company of this woman does not prove an intimacy in any judicial or proper sense of the term. A person may enjoy the company of a good woman or of a bad woman, and may be frequently in her company, without being intimate with either.

"The second item in this specification is that this intimacy was publicly known. Here is a city of thirty thousand inhabitants, and of this large number this court has produced no evidence that over five or six persons ever knew that the accused was even acquainted with her, to say nothing about intimacy. Of this whole city, there is produced only the testimony of one brother officer, a hack driver, a restaurant keeper, a cook, a newspaper reporter, and another courtesan,—and these are all who are brought forward to show by evidence that the 'public' were aware of this alleged intimacy. There are ministers, lawyers, doctors, merchants, mechanics, capitalists, men of every grade and condition, who comprise the 'public' of this city, and who know nothing of this matter.

"Could it be fairly said in any other case, like the engagement of your daughter or mine, that the fact was 'publicly known,' when only six people were conversant of it?

"There is no further testimony on this subject; hence this allegation remains unproved.

"The third item in this specification is that 'by his

publicly known intimacy he did give occasion for the publication,' and so forth.

"I submit, that it is too clear from the evidence to need argument, that the Gipseys's jealousy of the Queen's popularity at the Casino, and her mad determination to terminate her rival's reign at whatever cost, was the occasion of the publication, and that only.

"The reporter testifies that he obtained the news set forth in the newspaper article, not from the public, but from a notorious woman, who, I assert, then and there fabricated the scandalous portion of the article in question, and upon such proof the allegation is made that the accused 'gave occasion' for the publication. There is not a vestige of proof that the allegations in the publication were true, or that a single fact there alleged ever had any existence except in the vivid imagination of the reporter and the fertile tongue of the courtesan.

"In fine: as to this specification, there is no proof to substantiate a single count. Even the reporter himself, a man whose occupation is to hunt up news and to know what the people talk about, testifies that he has never heard but one or two persons talk of the accused in connection with the Queen. We may therefore safely conclude that the burden of proof rests in the untruthful tongue of the courtesan, and the desire for sensational news in the reporter.

"I submit, then, on this specification, that this court, guided by their solemn oath, cannot find that the accused was intimate with this woman, nor that his acquaintance with her was publicly known.

"You ask me what this evidence does show, as applicable to this specification. Simply this, and nothing more, — that the accused knew this woman, visited her twice, just as many other gentlemen — citizens and officers — did; and here permit me to say that, reprehensible as is the license which leads men in this frontier country to feel that they are beyond the reach of civilization, and not amenable to the same laws of virtue and decency that withheld them from open sin in their far-away homes, it is yet a fact that there is not the same degree of wrong in following a general custom and indulging a common license there would be if the accused was a solitary case of such dereliction; and while I cheerfully concede this to be a moral court, it is not a court of morals, and you are not father confessors authorized to enforce the commandments of the Church, but judges solemnly sworn before Almighty God to try specific allegations of fact.

"As to the second specification, that the accused did openly frequent a notorious den of infamy to such an extent as to render himself the subject of disgraceful and scandalous gossip by the public, it is equally unsustained by the evidence, for there is no testimony that prior to the publication of the newspaper article the public knew anything of the conduct of the accused, and it is but fair to conclude that all conversation on the subject occurred subsequently to, and consequent upon, the publication of the aforementioned article. In fact, had that article not appeared, it is fair to presume that the

public would now be in utter ignorance of even the existence of the accused.

"As to the third specification, that the accused did take as guests to the 'Starlight Restaurant' in Blackwood City the Queen and another woman of the same class, known as Gipse, and did then and there dine and drink with them, he, said accused, being well known as an officer of the army to the people of said restaurant, by whom the reputation and character of said women were also known. The substance of this specification lies in the allegation that accused was well known as an officer of the army, and the women as of ill-repute, for therein comes the discredit to the service.

"The abstract fact of his taking these women to the restaurant is not of the essence of the specification. The essential allegation is, their being known, and the accused subjecting himself to remark as an officer of the army.

"It is in evidence that the parties while there were secluded from public observation; that the accused was in citizens' clothes, was a total stranger to the people of the restaurant, and there was no way by which he could be distinguished as an officer of the army. There is no evidence to indicate that the people of the place knew who their guests were.

"If they had been known to the keepers of the restaurant the government could easily have proven the same. The absence of such testimony is conclusive that they did not know either the position of the accused or the character of his companions; were it otherwise, from the well-known relentless

efforts of the learned judge advocate in this case, we may conclude that such testimony would have been produced.

"There being no evidence whatever tending to establish the allegations of the specifications, I am convinced that by your solemn oath your finding must be, Not guilty."

CHAPTER XV.

I HAD not attended the trial during the weary thirty days it had continued, but some inexplicable influence impelled me on this last day to listen to the defence.

In spite of myself, and all my inveterate persecution of Winchester, his pale statue-like face and compressed lips appealed to my better nature for clemency and assistance ; but I would not hear the voice within which said, " Be merciful ! "

As Judge Percival began the defence, an unaccountable something in his voice or manner startled me, and his eloquent face held me spellbound. Surely I had seen that face before, and something in the *timbre* of his rich voice thrilled my heart like a strain of remembered music. Through all the long argument my soul was stirred to its foundation ; not by his matchless eloquence, but by the indescribable resemblance that he bore to the nameless presence which sat by the altar-fires of my heart.

When he had finished the argument regularly as to the specifications, he drew himself to his full height and said, —

" May it please the court : Having disposed of this case regularly, I ask you to consider dispassionately a theory that I have now the honor to submit to your scrutiny as to the cause of this unfortunate escapade

which must greatly palliate the enormity of the offence."

My eyes were upon Winchester as he spoke ; and I was surprised to see him start suddenly forward, glance quickly towards me, and flush to the temples, then shut his teeth firmly and grasp the arm of his chair, till the corded muscles in the wrist stood out like whipcord.

"What is it," I thought, "that he fears to have discovered, and how am I connected with it?"

I awoke to the fact that the judge was saying, —

"Taking this latitude, I act wholly upon my own responsibility, and without the approval of the accused. In the distant beautiful capital city of this glorious country, I have an honored father and beloved sister."

I started : could this be Marion's brother ; was that the secret of his resemblance ? I had known that the name was the same, but had never thought of such a relationship.

He continued : "My father, when a chaplain in the regular army, it seems, was the soldier's as well as the sinner's friend ; and from this circumstance the stricken mother of the accused, beside herself with grief, and knowing not what to do to save her son from irretrievable ruin, hastened to my father and sister for sympathy and counsel, feeling that in a former chaplain of the service, which she entered with her husband as a bride, where her children were born and reared, and where the best part of her life had been spent, she must find comfort if anywhere."

At the mention of his mother's name, Winchester's

stoical manner instantly changed. He bowed his head on his hand, and his whole frame shook with emotion.

As for me, the room seemed to be growing dark, for I realized that I had unknowingly pitted myself against one whom I had wronged, and still loved with all my heart.

Still his voice went on: "My father and sister were thoroughly enlisted in this cause, and urged me to save this promising young life from ruin, and to prevent the utter shipwreck of his mother's home.

"These persons who are interested, and I myself, believe that if the accused would unseal his lips and make a clean breast of it, that the whole mystery would be explained, and a plot revealed, or a motive given, for this singular departure from a hitherto clean and blameless life which would reflect credit instead of dishonor on the name of Leopold Winchester; but he refuses to speak on this subject. We can only conclude that, by the instrumentality of drugged liquors, and a temporary insanity, he knew not what he did.

"I have carefully probed to the bottom the implications in this letter, and through Lieutenant Howland I have learned that the Queen from the first time she saw the accused had set her snares to bring this seemingly unattainable prize to her feet, that she pursued him with notes, and that he could not enter Blackwood City without encountering her wiles to entrap him.

"The shooting affray I believe to have been the result of her mad exasperation when she became

aware that her well-laid plans were defeated, and her victim too clean or too wise to give her the power over him which she had so persistently sought to gain.

"Some kind of an altercation undoubtedly took place, but of what nature none but the accused has any knowledge. Not even to his legal adviser has he confided that pivotal circumstance upon which turns the disgrace or the honor of his future life.

"We can only conjecture that other names were involved, and upon this strained and mistaken sense of honor the accused will permit, by his silence, an adverse verdict to settle like a dark cloud over his professional career and his home hearth."

As I looked at Winchester, again I caught the quick glance of his eye, and a perplexed frown appeared on his white forehead; but he soon settled back into the stolid indifference which had characterized him during most of the trial

The judge continued :

"I have thus, may it please the court, gone through with the testimony bearing upon each specification under the second charge.

"Certainly the evidence does not prove the charge to such an extent that a hitherto fair name should be forever blasted, and shame brought upon the stainless record of an honored father, and distress, grief, and an endless sorrow to the mother and sister whose pride and hope he has been since death removed their natural protector, the brave Colonel Winchester.

"In view of the sad consequences of an adverse

finding, it becomes my duty to ask you to bring to the consideration of this question the clearest comprehension of the legal views here presented, with hearts softened to respond to that common humanity which judges a brother man as we would be judged ourselves ; to judge mercifully, as we are told, upon authority high in every court and every land since the days of Shakespeare, is the duty of courts as well as the dictates of human conscience. We are told that —

“ ‘ Mercy is an attribute to God himself,
And earthly power doth then show likest God’s,
When mercy seasons justice.’ ”

“ I do not claim that the accused is guiltless, nor that he is undeserving of punishment ; but I do claim and demand that, considering the human passions and infirmities which belong to us all, considering the temptations of this and every city, he has not done that which should condemn him to irretrievable ruin and disgrace.

“ The brightest names that emblazon our country’s history have at times been shadowed by the dark discs of carnal passion ; and if youthful indiscretion and temporary folly had been considered sufficient cause to strip the epaulets from a young officer’s shoulders, some of the most heroic pages of our country’s history would never have been written. Some of the names now enshrined in the hearts of a great free people would forever have remained unhonored and unsung.

“ Take all this evidence, make the most of it, give

it all the weight to which it is entitled, and what does it amount to?

"Simply that youthful folly, thoughtlessness, and indiscretion which has marred and darkened the early days of many a deathless name. Even in these follies the accused is shown to have brought no discredit on his cloth, — to have been scrupulously careful, when in doubtful company, that his official relations should remain unknown.

"In no single instance is it shown that his conduct was other than that of a private gentlemanly citizen, offending the public in no way by manners, conduct, or appearance, and careful at all times in the presence of strangers that his military position should be unknown.

"Does anything indicate that he is one with whom his brother officers cannot associate without loss of self-respect?

"'Conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman,' as defined in military law, must be such as to make him an unfit associate for officers and gentlemen, and to render his expulsion from their society necessary to the preservation of the respect due to them as a class.

"Can it be fairly said that, considering men as they are and society as it is, the accused has been proved unfit to associate with officers and gentlemen?

"If such rule were applied, how many officers and gentlemen would escape the charge of unfitness?

"This is a matter of more than life and death to the accused, — a matter of never-ending shame and dishonor to him, and sorrow untold to a loving

mother, who at the capital city this day, in mingled agony, fear, and hope, is awaiting your verdict, and praying God, as only a widowed mother can pray, that this bitter cup may pass from her lips, and sunshine come again to her darkened home and heart.

"You, gentlemen, have the power, and according to the evidence and your solemn oath, the duty is upon you, to declare that this charge is not sustained.

"I leave the accused and his cause in your hands, trusting that the God whose help you have solemnly invoked will direct and control your finding, and firmly believing that the honor of the service does not demand his sacrifice, and that it will be your pleasure so to determine.

"By this, you will bring gladness to a stricken home, and illustrate in your finding the golden words of Portia that —

"'Earthly power doth then show likest God's,
When mercy seasons justice.'"

CHAPTER XVI.

NOT many days had passed before I presented myself at the door of Dr. Percival and asked for Marion. She extended her hand in glad welcome as I entered the room, and I involuntarily stooped to kiss her ; but with a quick movement she eluded me and gravely said, —

"Hugh Atherton, do not forget what I said to you."

"But, Marion," I replied, "you surely cannot mean it now?"

"I certainly do, Hugh," was all she said ; but her words seemed to come from the depths of a great sorrowful heart.

"This is very cruel," I said sharply.

"I should be a poor pupil indeed, Hugh," she replied, "if I had not learned to shield my life from the promptings of my heart."

"Your life shall not suffer again through me, Marion," I said, inexpressibly touched by her tear-filled eyes, and the pathos of her voice.

"That is well, and to that end I must hold my life free from a weak yielding to a love which has well-nigh wrecked it."

With a quick movement she faced me, and continued : "It was through your first kiss that I learned for the first time in my life what real love is."

"For the first time in your life?" I asked in aston-

ishment ; " I am sure that I have heard of a serious romance in your life some years ago, before I ever saw you."

" Yes," she smilingly answered, " that must have been a romance indeed which could pass so completely out of my life and thoughts. True love is eternal ; and the brain fever which followed that unhappy experience was no less truly an abnormal condition than the love which caused me so much sorrow ; for when I took up my life again, that fire was as completely burned out as if it had never existed, leaving me absolutely free."

" A thought occurred to me. I had often wondered why she had studied medicine, for she did not seem like one of those mannish women who are ever longing for a wider sphere of action ; and this experience of hers seemed to furnish an elucidation of the mystery ; so I said, —

" Was this why you took up a profession ?"

" It led to it," she answered with a smile ; " work, severe, laborious, toilsome work, was the only panacea for an ill like that, and I did work to attain my profession, — afterwards in my regular practice in hospital and city missionary work, until I found my strength failing, and my father needing me in his home."

" And you are sure," I said, with a fierce twinge of jealousy at my heart, " that no vestige of the old love remains ?"

" None remains," she answered ; then, looking me steadily in the face, she added, " and when I became convinced that you loved me, I thanked God that I

had been prevented from committing the irreparable folly of uniting my fate with one whose hold on my affections was of so slight a tenure."

The expression of her face as she said this was one of such joyous thankfulness that I was completely overwhelmed with the thought of what my own folly had defrauded me of.

I longed to clasp her in my arms and to claim her as my own, but I knew that any attempt at nearer approach would only bring another repulse; yet, without realizing what I was doing, I had extended my arms and pleadingly said, —

"Marion, will you not come to me?"

She looked at me as if she thought heaven could not bring greater happiness than to pillow her weary head on my shoulder; but she slowly shook her head, and answered me, —

"Ah that I might; but I cannot, I cannot!"

We had both been standing for some time; but I saw that I still had a long struggle before me, and praying her to be seated, drew my own chair near her and prepared for a long argument.

"Have I thoroughly worn out your love, then?" I asked.

"I only wish you had," she replied; "but, unfortunately, real love is not so easily destroyed, at least not the supreme love of a life."

"And you believe in different degrees of love, then?" I interrupted.

"We are obliged to believe what we have proved by personal experience," she answered. "I have no doubt that a large proportion of the people who

think they marry for love would find by my standard that they had come far short of it; yet they may go through life comfortably happy if fate does not throw in their way the one whom God intended for them."

"You surely cannot doubt now, Marion, that we — you and I — love each other in the true sense?" I said quickly; for the idea of possible doubt of me, which always took possession of me now when in her presence, goaded me almost to madness.

"I have no doubts in regard to myself, so far as the ideal man bearing your name is concerned; but, unless I am mistaken, my beloved Hugh Atherton bore little resemblance to you save in personal appearance," she said in a trembling, hesitating voice.

"Marion," said I, "can you never forgive and forget the past?"

"It seems hardly possible," she answered, "to have loved, as I did, a man who seemed honest and honorable to the last degree, one who would not stoop to falsehood, who would scorn to win a woman's love for mere pastime, whose aspirations were towards the highest, whose standard of womanhood was the most exalted! The personification of candor, — his admiration, reverence, — his love, worship, — his character a tower of manly strength, upon which the strongest woman might trustingly lean and find un-failing comfort and support; and then finding him but a myth, — to forget. Much may be forgiven, but to forget is a harder task."

There was not a vestige of censure in her tone or manner, but it was a dispassionate summing up of

the weighty reasons which had demanded of her self-respect this explanation of her doubts as to the expediency of again trusting one who had so grossly abused her confidence. Possibly she wondered what the man she loved would think of the moral principle of a woman who could think lightly of all the dishonorable treatment which her accusing words implied.

I was not only so rebuked that I could not hold my head erect, but I felt humbled to the dust by the undeserved compliment she had paid me. As soon as I could command my voice, I said, —

"I trust that you will believe I appreciate your exalted estimate of the Hugh Atherton you knew and loved, and I do not quite despair of being able to convince you that my seeming dishonor has some extenuating circumstances. Sinful as my life has been, I am not quite so bad as your words imply; and when I told you, on our first acquaintance, that I was not a marrying man, I was sincere in my intentions towards you."

"I believed you so," she replied, "or I should not have given you the unbounded confidence which never swerved from first to last."

I looked at her as she sat there, — a lady in every movement from the crown of her intellectual head to the sole of her foot, — and asked, —

"How could I be so conceited as to think that there was anything in me at my best to win such love as you gave me? I enjoyed your society, and if you seemed to like me well, I thought, 'these are subtle society flatteries, and mean nothing;' so I tried to excel you in deferential attention."

She looked me in the face with a strange smile, and said, —

"Then you thought me insincere?"

"No, no," I hastened to reply; "but your easy complimentary manner I attributed to familiarity with the social code which makes every one feel at ease, and not to any special feeling towards me."

"I thought you were free," she said; "you told me so."

"I did, and I told you also that I had remained single for the sake of my only daughter, who strenuously objected to my marrying again, and who had won from me a promise to that effect. I told you this after I began to see the sorrow in store for both of us from my continued visits. I almost hoped, yet dreaded, that you would forbid me to come."

"Yes," she said in a low voice, "and your scrupulous observance of those points of honor fascinated me more than anything else."

My heart ached for her as I answered, —

"I suppose so; and as I was no less interested, the way out of the difficulty was not easy. When I became sure that your love was mine, I thought it would be better to release myself from the promise I had made before I had also drawn you into the struggle which I expected to have before I could extricate myself from the embarrassing position in which my weak yielding to my daughter's entreaties had placed me. There were also other matters which I wished to adjust. I had carelessly blundered into a seeming position towards you which I heartily wished was my real one, and I parted from

you fully intending to make it so. The rest you know; but you can never understand the perils and subtle temptations of a man's life."

"I know more about them than you think, perhaps," she said. "I am aware that army life has more to contend with in that line than any other; I know that no station in life is exempt from the influence of designing women, and if a man has not the moral courage to 'be a man for a' that,' and resist temptation, scandal and retributive justice follow outraged morality, and his innocent wife, if he has one, suffers with him."

"How do you know these things?" I asked.

"Partly through my profession, partly from observation, but largely from my early training. My mother had peculiar ideas about such matters, and being determined that no harm should come to her children through ignorance, she taught us herself all the secrets of the laws of life, and the results which would follow their violation. She talked as freely," she continued, "with my brother as with me, and he always came to me with all his trials of this kind."

"That is unusual," I said; "but such companionship must be salutary in its influence. The value of a sister is beyond estimation; and I sincerely regret that no such influence ever came into my life. I might have been different in many respects."

The hour had arrived when I must go, and as I arose, her face had taken on a look of sadness which I felt was reflected in my own, and she evidently saw it, for she said, —

"I wish you could say good-night to me in a

happy mood, for your sad face haunts me until we meet again."

"And how about yourself?" I answered: "do you think it costs me nothing to know that I have darkened your life? What are you going to do about it, Marion?"

"Ask my Heavenly Father for guidance and strength," she said reverently, "as I wish you would, Hugh." She looked imploringly into my face, and continued, "If you only would, life might be all sunshine for both of us very soon."

"I would if I could, Marion, just to please you," I said.

"Oh, no, not to please me, but because of your own needs, because your own soul must come to the pitying Saviour or die," she said earnestly.

"No, Marion," I answered, "there is no use, I am past saving."

This conversation ended where it began, as all such talk always did, only I felt comforted somehow while she was speaking.

I walked to my hotel, chafing under the fate which separated me from the woman I loved, and feeling that I could never go back to the post without her.

I was almost ready to pray God to give her to me and I would ask no more, but I felt that He would not hear.

CHAPTER XVII.

ELINOR MARSHALL accompanied her foster-parents to Washington, and without waiting for ceremony called upon Mrs. Winchester and Amelia, whom she had known and loved when Colonel Winchester was under General McIntyre's command. She remembered Mrs. Winchester as a stately, dignified, beautiful woman, who led the social life at the garrison, and whose smiling face was like sunshine to all who knew her. As she entered the parlor, Elinor was startled by the change in her appearance from the bright woman she had known only a few years ago.

"Are you not well, Mrs. Winchester?" she inquired.

The eyes into which she looked were heavy with sorrow as she replied, —

"Miss Marshall, I have been in dreadful affliction since I saw you. My Leo, my only son, has been treated with great injustice and dismissed from the service. My heart is broken!" and as she spoke, the tear-drops fell heavily on her thin hands, which were tightly clasped in her lap.

"But," said Elinor, "if it was an unjust dismissal, he should be restored."

"Oh that he could be!" said Mrs. Winchester; "but what can we do? This trouble has already cost us so much, and nothing accomplished. No

one would be willing to take it up and push it through for what we could give them."

"Mrs. Winchester," Elinor said quietly, "will you trust the case in my hands? I will do my best, and, — never mind about the pay."

"You?"

"Yes: you know I have been admitted to the bar and have had some practice. Perhaps the novelty of a woman's handling such a case might be an advantage," she answered slowly, as if weighing the matter in her own mind.

"Oh, I would be so glad!" said Mrs. Winchester with a burst of tears.

Elinor was full of faith in a cause if just, and had had no experience in the intricacies of the restoration of dismissed army officers; but believing the Administration to be just in all its intentions, she had high hopes of restoring the young man to his former position.

After learning from Mrs. Winchester what the reader already knows of the proceedings in this case, she said, —

"How was it that you did not prevent the proceedings of the court-martial being approved by the President?"

"I can only state the facts to you, Miss Marshall. I cannot comprehend it upon any other hypothesis than that of a deep-laid plot, so deliberately planned and so perfectly executed that we cannot even guess the perpetrators. You, lawyer-like, will at once look for the motive, and of that we have no suspicion, as I have told you. It appears as if a superior

officer and personal friend had suddenly become an implacable and malignant enemy ; but I may as well acknowledge that this is all conjecture, and, as far as facts are concerned, we are still in total ignorance of the name and quality or object of this hidden foe."

"There is so much jealousy in the army, Mrs. Winchester, not wholly without cause, perhaps, but often very trifling, and sometimes wholly imaginary."

Mrs. Winchester, intent on her own trouble, did not seem to notice the remark of Elinor, but continued, —

"The Adjutant General promised our friend Senator Ferris to notify him immediately upon the proceedings reaching the War Department ; and when Mrs. Gillette and I went there to have the proceedings stayed, they had already been signed."

"Mrs. Winchester, do you tell me that the Adjutant General failed to keep his promise to Senator Ferris?"

"He did ; and when I told the senator that the President had approved the findings in Leo's case, he was indignant, and went immediately to demand an explanation."

"What could General Smith say for himself?" Elinor asked.

"He said he had never seen the papers. 'But,' said Senator Ferris, 'your signature is on them.'"

"'I did not know that I had seen those papers,' replied the general. 'I must have signed them formally.'"

"'Do you mean to say,' said Senator Ferris in-

dignantly, 'that the people's hired servants are so careless of the trusts placed in their hands as to sign papers ignorant of their contents, when those papers always *may*, as they *did* in this case, involve the ruin of a life and the destruction of a home?'

"We should not, I confess, Senator Ferris ; but we fall into a certain routine, and it unconsciously becomes more or less mechanical,' said the general.

"Senator Ferris was too annoyed to choose his words, and answered hotly, —

"Well, when an official reaches that point, it is quite time that he vacate his office for some one more careful of the people's interests.'

"Though it relieved his feelings, it did not help our case," added Mrs. Winchester.

It was arranged that Elinor take the matter in charge, and she put her whole soul into the work of inducing the Administration to review the records, with a view to the reappointment of Lieutenant Winchester.

Elinor confidently believed that all there was to do in this case was to induce the Secretary of War to examine the record of the proceedings, and recommend to the President a reappointment on the grounds of "unjust dismissal," and the deed was done. It was her first experience in practice before the departments.

These large bodies move so slowly that she was weeks in securing an interview with the Secretary of War, who very kindly told her how to proceed with a formal application for young Winchester's reappointment, and a re-examination of the proceed-

ings of the case in connection with those in the case of Lieutenant Howland.

The application was duly filed with the department, but how to get the case through the hands of the various officials and before the secretary was a problem.

There was but one army man in the whole list who did not cut Lieutenant Winchester on every occasion.

Elinor decided that nothing but "influence" could start the ball rolling, and again she impressed her Uncle Percival into her service. He was one of those army chaplains who, destitute of sectarianism, but full of zeal for the Master, had been universally respected and beloved by Catholic and Protestant alike, and even the scoffing and indifferent touched their caps with a reverent air as his benign face passed them by. There were no quarters of the rank or file where he was not always welcome. No social occasion was quite complete without him; and now, with his snow-white hair and gracious manner, he was equally well received anywhere in Washington.

His influence was sought by all who wished to obtain favor in high places, for it was said that he could gain an audience with the President or with a cabinet official at any time, even when they were "engaged" to all other callers.

Having secured this open sesame to the ears of the "powers that be," Elinor felt that the prospect began to brighten.

Several weeks were now consumed in interview-

ing the officials, who all promised to do whatever was possible to further the interests of Lieutenant Winchester's cause, and get the papers speedily examined at each stage of their route to the desk of the Secretary of War.

The case seemed to be advancing with every prospect of success, when, like a thunderbolt from a clear sky, came the following letter from the War Department : —

“ WAR DEPARTMENT,

“ *Adjutant General's Office,*

“ Washington, Sept. —, 18 .

“ Miss Elinor Marshall,

“ Washington, D.C.

“ Madame :

“ Referring to your letter of August 18, submitting papers in the case of Leopold Winchester, late first lieutenant, —th cavalry, who appeals to the President for a re-examination of the proceedings of the court-martial in his case, and for reappointment as a lieutenant in the army, I have the honor to inform you that the Secretary of War and the President have earnestly considered the appeal, but are unable to find any grounds to justify a reopening of the case, which, as appears from the record evidence, was carefully examined by President —, whose action was final.

“ The President furthermore is of the opinion that he is powerless, under the law, to afford the relief sought.

“ Very respectfully,

“ Your obedient servant,

“ *Adjutant General —.*”

CHAPTER XVIII.

I WENT often after this to Dr. Percival's. Every opportunity was given me to converse with Marion at my leisure, every member of the family seeming to recognize me as her especial guest.

We soon fell into the old ways of passing the evening, but I had apparently made no progress towards the consummation of the one purpose of my life. Days merged into weeks, and still I was unanswered. Marion always received me with a joyous welcome. She seemed perfectly satisfied in my society, and yet the fear of possible repulse kept my coward lips from insisting upon a decision of my claims to her hand, which, if favorable, would bring me all of happiness that I could hope or wish for, and if not, would extinguish it forever. She alone should be the guardian angel to lead me into perfect peace, or I must be hopelessly lost.

I was firmly resolved that this particular evening should decide my fate, but my unlucky stars were against me. I had hardly seated myself when the card of Mrs. Brooks was handed to Marion.

"Bid her come in," she said to the servant; and a delicate, pale-faced woman entered.

A gentle, dignified, "I am glad to meet you, sir," as Marion introduced her, was all she said as she accepted the easy-chair that was placed for her.

I noticed the trembling of the thin, small hands,

which looked so unfitted to cope with the rough world, and the glance towards me as I reseated myself and by that movement intimated that I did not intend to take my departure.

It took some courage to broach her subject then and there, but she did it.

"Miss Percival," she said, "I am sorry to ask anything more of you, but I do not know what is to become of us. My child's life has been graciously spared to me, but unless I can get something to do we must perish of want."

Here her emotion overcame her, and the struggle for self-control was pitiful.

Marion turned to me with a grave, compassionate earnestness, and said, —

"Colonel Atherton, here is a chance for you to do a good deed."

"I will do anything I can for you," I answered.

"Not for me," she said, "but for 'one of His little ones.'"

"Any way you choose to put it," I replied, "but what can I do?"

"Go in person to some of your friends — I know you have one, and perhaps more — at the head of a bureau, and try to obtain a position for her," she said quickly.

"I will go to-morrow and see what can be done," I said.

Mrs. Brooks thanked us, and soon took her leave.

"What have they been doing all this time?" I questioned.

"They were obliged to quit the house of Mrs.

Weeks as soon as Bessie was well enough to be removed, for the family had become so afraid of taking the fever that they dared not keep them. Dr. Henderson looked for rooms ; but no one wanted to take in a family who were sick and poor, so he sought admission for them to the ' Christian Woman's Home,' and this beautiful charity took them in. Mrs. Brooks has been quite ill since they went there, and Bessie is still very feeble."

"I will make it my first business to do what I can," said I. "And now, Marion, let us talk of ourselves. We have been only drifting all these weeks, and it has been very pleasant ; but it is not enough ; I want you to belong to my life, — to control and guide it ;" and I tried to take her hand.

She quietly withdrew it, and said pleasantly, —

"It is too great a task to undertake the control of one who fails to control himself."

"Miss Percival," I said, with a flash of temper, of which I was afterwards ashamed, "I curb more temper every day of my life than you ever had ; what can you know of what I have to contend with?"

"Hugh !" she exclaimed reproachfully, "your present manner proves my words true ; but you are mistaken in your assertion. I had just as fiery a disposition once as you have now."

"How did you conquer it so thoroughly?" I asked.

"By using all my powers to prevent its indulgence, and seeking help from the supreme source which never fails," she answered reverently.

"Then you are just the one to help me," I said,

seizing eagerly upon her own words as a convincing argument.

She dropped her graceful head for a moment, as if in thought, and then said gravely, —

"I do not feel equal to an undertaking of such magnitude. You must be capable of guiding yourself, before you can attempt to pilot me over life's stormy waters."

"That is just it," I said ; "I do not wish to control you or your life ; marry me, and you shall be free as air and do with me what you will."

She looked at me as if weighing every word she said, and replied, —

"If I marry, my husband must be the complement of my existence. The home of which I am mistress must have a lord and master capable of reigning supreme in and over my life."

"Do you think any man lives who can do that?" I asked.

"I believed there was one such man before you forfeited my confidence," she answered.

I was growing desperate again. I would have gone on my knees to her had I not known that she would despise me for doing it ; but I said pleadingly, —

"Marion, with your help I will become all that you ever believed me to be. You cannot despise the sin and folly of my worse than wasted life half as much as I do. I know that you love me, and if you will but trust me my future shall redeem the past, and make the future bright for both of us."

"I cannot," she said, "become the life guardian

of a man with such constitutional defects as yours. I must be sustained, not the sustainer. There can be no happiness founded on love without confidence, and I could not trust you beyond the influence of my personal presence."

I could not hear this calmly, and felt a fierce rage rising within me that seemed to prompt me to wrest from her the promise I wanted, and conquer the indomitable spirit which would not yield even to its own importunities. I said through set teeth, —

"Sometime you will repent having told me that you could not trust me out of your sight."

"There is nothing in this world I should be so glad to repent of," she said earnestly, and her tone was so sad and hopeless that it cooled my anger; but I think there must have been some asperity in my voice as I remarked coolly, —

"In face of your present doubts I am somewhat at a loss to know what could have elicited the unbounded confidence you gave in the first of our acquaintance."

"Your own manliness, to begin with," she said; "then public reputation had heralded you as a man of influence, and the manner in which you were received among my friends here was a sufficient passport to our acquaintance. Perhaps you do not know that the post surgeon at Deering has been almost a father to me, for I knew him when he was at Santa Fé. When I found that my happiness depended on your integrity, I wrote to him for information and advice."

"Your course in this matter seems to me to have been a little peculiar," I said bitterly.

"I think Surgeon Ranney thought so," she answered, for the first sentence of his reply was, 'I should think you were in love twenty fathoms deep.'"

As she became aware of the effect her words were having on me, a wave of rosy red swept over her face, for I had caught her hand and held it in my own.

"You need not blush, dear," I said; "it is all right. What more did Surgeon Ranney say?"

As I stooped to look in her sweet face, she colored still more as she answered in a low voice, —

"It is very hard for me to tell you, Hugh. I do not know what you will think of me that it did not set me on my guard, but it seemed impossible to doubt you then."

The old look of perfect trust had come into her face for the moment, and I was transported with the thought that she was mine at last; but it was only for a moment, for the old guarded expression soon returned with a shrinking fear, as I urged her to tell me all he had said to her.

"He said that he knew you by reputation, having been at Deering but a short time, as a man whose *penchant* for gallantry was as extended as your acquaintance; and that you were without doubt a man of the world in all that it implied."

I must have looked surprised, for Marion lowered her proud head as she continued, —

"If Surgeon Ranney had stopped with this, and



"Winchester, wounded and disgraced." (Page 126.)

warned me against extending the acquaintance, it would probably have had some weight with me ; but he said, ' It does not follow that Colonel Atherton is not wholly sincere with you, or that he would not make a most devoted husband.' He added that he would be greatly pleased to see me happily married. He also said that the unstable morals of men not bound in law and honor to one woman is largely the result of bad rearing or none at all, and the conventional false social codes they encounter when their young manhood is launched upon the world. He closed by saying that, as a rule, men are not as innately bad in social morals as their actions seem to indicate."

"The surgeon is undeniably right in his premises, so far as the social code is concerned," I said. "When the young man first launches his bark upon the social sea, he finds that the bright attractive young lady regards one of unquestioned integrity as a dullard, — 'too stupid for anything.' He has not enough wickedness in him to be interesting. He soon finds that a reputation for being fast is his best passport into society, and as long as these standards obtain, immorality will be at a premium among men. But," I added with a sudden jealous twinge, "how dare Surgeon Ranney write such a letter to you?"

"Because of his disinterested personal friendship, based upon thorough acquaintance and unbounded esteem, added to his knowledge that I have given much thought and study to social questions."

"What ever interested you in them?" I asked.

"I think it is not usual for ladies to care very much for such subjects."

"My profession, principally," she replied, "and much that I have seen and known. I cannot tell you to-night, but sometime perhaps I may talk with you about it. I assure you it is a very serious question to me, involving the most sacred interests of human life." She arose as she said this, and I felt that I was being quietly dismissed.

I bade her good-night and walked slowly to my hotel, pondering on the wonderful influence this strangest of women had upon my life.

CHAPTER XIX.

MRS. MASON, who had chaperoned Marion in Paris, had been many years a widow. To fill the great void bereavement had made in her life, she devoted herself to the most indefatigable literary work. She had been dearly loved as a wife, and she was as devoted to Mr. Mason's memory as she had been faithful to her living husband. The field of literary work she had chosen was the broad one of *belles-lettres*. The refining influence of this work was not more apparent in those who came under her instruction than in her own gracious manner. Her dignity of carriage, her quiet repose, her thorough self-control, reflected that higher type of culture which is the result of singleness of purpose and forgetfulness of self.

She was Marion's aunt, not many years her senior, and was spending some weeks with her niece, whom she very dearly loved.

One Sunday evening found them seated in the parlor, which ever wore a homelike look, and which was never permitted to appear in holiday attire too good for use, but with its bright satin shades, its easy-chairs, and glowing grate, seemed always an attractive place to all who had ever been favored visitants.

Sitting near the drop-light, Marion seemed intently reading one of George Eliot's novels. Her abund-

ant hair was swept back from her temples in curling waves, her dark eyes were bent upon her book, her cheeks radiant with the glow of health ; but, with a little frown of impatience on her smooth brow, she suddenly dropped the book into her lap, with the manner of one who had been making a persevering but fruitless attempt to become interested in what she was reading ; she turned to Mrs. Mason and said somewhat petulantly, —

“If the manner in which people are pictured in the average work of fiction is like real life, I must be entirely unlike other people. I have read chapter after chapter of this popular book without finding a single sentence that touched a chord of sympathy in my own nature.”

Mrs. Mason deliberately laid her open magazine face downward on the table beside her, and said with a smile, —

“You are as unlike women in general, Marion, as if you belonged to another race. You are thoroughly unconventional in regard to many things.”

“And am I to blame, or is it the result of my training?”

“There is no question of blame, my dear : it is the mere statement of a fact.”

“Well, you know, aunt, that my mother had peculiar ideas about bringing up her children ; and she taught me that a good name — what we were in the sight of men — is more to be desired than great riches, but that a clear conscience — what we were in the sight of God — is incomparably more to be desired.”

"Yes, I know," Mrs. Mason replied ; " your whole life and every act of it has been based on that idea. I think it must have been that peculiarity of your character which has made me love you so well, Marion. You know we always admire our opposites. Then, too, I have always been so anxious about you, fearing you would unconsciously walk on society's conservative toes, and find yourself unmercifully censured for the accident. That has kept me thinking of you more than of my other nieces, who are too conservative to forget for an instant the claims of the dear public."

"My dear auntie, am I so different from every one else, and does it trouble you?"

"Not so much as it did, dear ; for I have learned that, with all your eccentricities, you seem to escape any serious quicksands."

She paused, and, tapping the end of the paper-knife on the table, slowly reversed it two or three times, as if revolving the question in her mind, then continued, —

"Other people have convictions of duty and purposes to accomplish ; but they go about it differently, feeling a certain degree of timidity about the manner in which it is done. They ask themselves, 'How can I attain success without provoking the adverse criticism of others?' On the contrary, you go straight ahead, looking neither to the right nor to the left, wholly oblivious of all persons or things not connected with your ultimate purpose, self-absorbed in the one immediate object to be attained."

"No, I am not timid," replied Marion ; " and per-

haps I ought to be sorry that I am not a trembling, clinging creature, following a course mapped out for me by conventional rules ; but I think God must have known what He had for me to do when He gave me my straightforward characteristics. It would have been extremely inconvenient to be a coward, morally or physically."

Mrs. Mason smiled and said, —

"But, Marion, conforming to the usages of society does not imply cowardice."

"No?" she said in an interrogatory tone ; then slowly, "I suppose not, and I do not mean to do anything out of the way. I would not impair my usefulness by giving cause for offence. I never interfere with other people's opinions, and I never attempt to force mine upon them."

"I know it," said Mrs. Mason ; "but you enjoy as much as any one the approval of those whose opinions you value, while you do not seem to suffer from the disapprobation of those you love in like proportion."

"You are not wholly right in your conclusions, dear auntie. I value criticism if it is kindly, and I deplore anything which alienates the few friends I love ; but 'I am what I am.'"

"What I mean, Marion, is this : you do not seem as sensitive as most women would be in regard to personal criticism."

"That may be, but difference in that regard does not imply a different nature ; it only gives evidence of a stronger rein over its manifestation. I never could see the utility of tears over ordinary vexations.

It is easier to laugh than to cry, and has a more salutary effect on the mind and person."

"You are moved to tears quickly enough, Marion, whenever you read the prosiest thing in relation to domestic happiness; one might infer that you are constitutionally homesick."

"They would not be far from right, auntie. I am homesick for a home of my own, where love is its crowning joy;" and the tear-filled eyes showed that she was intensely moved.

After a few moments' silence she said, "What else, auntie? I want to hear the whole charge now."

"My dear child, I am not arraigning you. I simply answered your own appeal to know why or how you differed from other people; but I have often thought that in one particular respect you are quite unlike any other person I have ever known. Most women suffer wrong in silence, rather than expose to the world their wounds, especially those of the heart. I have marvelled greatly that you have permitted even your friends to know the gross wrong done you by Hugh Atherton."

With a grave, peculiar smile, Marion looked her aunt in the face and replied, —

"My dear aunt, I would rather every one I knew should think I have a heart capable of being thus wronged, than to think what they always have thought of me."

"And pray what is that, my dear?"

With a flashing eye and a slightly raised voice she answered, —

"That I care for nothing but to discharge the duty

nearest to me, that there is neither romance nor sentiment in my nature, that I am 'good-humored but no fun in me,' that I am indifferent to all men and would not marry any one."

"There is nothing seriously unpleasant about that, I am sure," said her aunt soothingly.

"I have never had any higher ambition than to be a womanly woman," continued Marion. "I have had no prejudices against the married state. I have always believed marriage to be ordained of God, and that every true woman looks towards it as the perfection of her happiness. It is not every woman who meets the man that seems to be the complement of her life; and when she does, if Fate steps in and separates her from him, it is but natural that in her anguish of spirit she shows the wound it makes."

"True, Marion; but in most cases a woman's pride would equal her love, and the reputation of being jilted is not desirable, to say the least; while, at the same time, it wrecks all chances of future happiness."

"Aunt Mason, you of all women should know that when one has once met one's fate, it is no longer a question of future chances, even though disappointment, separation, or death has come between."

"But, Marion, you surely do not mean that you will for his sake remain single all your life. I want to see you happily married, and I still believe that I shall."

At this moment Elinor entered the parlor, book in hand; but seeing the other books laid aside, and divining from the expression of Mrs. Mason's and

Marion's faces that the conversation might be private, she turned to leave the room, but both ladies in the same breath said, —

"Come in!"

"You will intrude upon no privacy, cousin," said Marion; "auntie and I fell into a discussion from my remarking that I found characters in books so unnatural from my point of view. It might, however, be that my point of view was peculiar to myself, for I had read so many pages of this popular book, and found nothing that struck a chord of sympathy in my own being."

A low ripple of laughter parted Elinor's red lips, and coming directly to the point, as she always did, she said, —

"Would you want to be like any one else? I greatly prefer being wholly unlike every one but myself."

"No, indeed; and I was explaining why. Aunt Alice is so conservative that she doubts the propriety of independent action in unmarried women," said Marion, with a little wicked glance at Mrs. Mason.

"Does she? Well, then, we'll have to get married!" and Elinor gave her a little vicious squeeze which elicited an exclamation and a protest.

"I wouldn't have either of you different from what you are," she said laughingly, "and I hope those myths of husbands will agree with me."

Just then a servant handed Marion the card of Mrs. Brooks.

"Show her in," she said.

Mrs. Brooks entered with a beaming face, and as Marion advanced to meet her, she said, —

"Your face says that you have some good news or good fortune."

"It is both," Mrs. Brooks replied. "I have my appointment. I was sworn in yesterday at the War Department. Colonel Atherton looked into the matter, and insisted upon the appointment being made at once."

"That is good enough, Mrs. Brooks, and certainly very kind of Colonel Atherton. I am glad your brave struggle is ended."

"I came around to say that I am very grateful to you, Miss Percival, for I am sure that it was your influence with the colonel that brought it about."

"Not mine alone, I think ; you have other friends who know him," answered Marion.

As Mrs. Brooks left, Marion walked slowly back to her chair, and said as if soliloquizing, —

"It certainly was kind and thoughtful of Hugh to do that."

"It is what I should think it would be just like him to do," said Elinor ; "he seems great-hearted and generous, has a perfectly frank and open countenance, and looks to be a thoroughly manly man in every respect."

Marion colored slightly as she replied, —

"You are impressed just as I was when I first knew him."

"I am sure, Marion, he would grow more interesting with acquaintance."

"Yes," she said with a sigh, "but —"

"But what, Cousin Marion?"

"I was thinking of the inexplicable mystery and broken faith involved in that marriage," she said wearily.

Elinor looked at her curiously, for Marion had not confided to her the conversations she had held with Hugh Atherton; and she had frequently wondered if the breach was healed and he would be received by Marion as of old.

"Why cannot you accept your friend Surgeon Ranney's opinion, that if the truth could be ascertained, it would be found to his credit as an honorable man?"

"Ah, Elinor, I have always believed his high sense of honor to be his crowning virtue; but I cannot understand how he can be wholly blameless."

Every vestige of color left her face; and as she strove to continue, her trembling lips warned Elinor that a crisis was imminent if she did not say something to counteract it.

"Do not try to understand," she interrupted; "you will know in good time, and if you do not, why make yourself unhappy by useless conjectures? What heavy storms may have passed over his life you cannot tell, but it may be your privilege to bless it with your sunshine, or it may have been some slight and almost imperceptible friction that has knotted and tangled life's silken threads, but it may be that your gentle hands can unravel the skein, and weave it into a bright-hued future that you can share together. Do not permit your imagination or your pride to stand between you and happiness; for I

believe, my cousin, that you have but to reach out your hand and grasp it."

The magic of Elinor's voice, and her hopeful words, had restored Marion's usual calmness, and with a "Thank you, my sweet cousin," she left the parlor.

CHAPTER XX.

LIEUTENANT WINCHESTER had been aware for some time that some secret influence, prejudicial to his case, was undermining all that was being done in his favor, and had succeeded in biasing the opinion of the Adjutant General to such an extent that Dr. Percival began to doubt his willingness to redeem the pledge that he had given him, to look carefully into the case before a final decision was reached.

The "Army and Navy Journal" published an item which resembled in substance the letter of the Adjutant General to Miss Marshall.

The discovery of this secret enemy, and the fear that every hope was lost, told sadly on Mrs. Winchester; and Marion, in the character of consoler and adviser, was often called upon for a comforting word.

"My dear Mrs. Winchester," she said, as that lady came to her in tears, "all is being done that can be done. Miss Marshall is working night and day on the case, my father is using his influence with all his army friends and political officials. All these things ought to offset any personal enmity that is at work against a rehearing of the case. You must be patient and self-controlled, dear lady, for Leo's sake."

"I know," she replied; "but it is so hard to feel that we, who have always held our heads so high,

feeling that we had reason for pride in our untarnished name, should have to bear this deep humiliation."

"You think more of it, I am sure, than others do, dear Mrs. Winchester; try to throw off this depression of spirits, and think that there are other avenues of usefulness and honor for your son besides the army."

But the mother would not be comforted. She was in a condition bordering on distraction. Leo's disgrace was her only thought; and her morbid sensibilities construed every look, every tone of voice, every movement of her friends of former times, into a consciousness of the obloquy which had come upon them through this much-beloved son.

Elinor Marshall, in the mean time, was not idle. She had made the sorrows of this stricken family her own personal matter, and had impressed her friends into their service by eliciting the same sympathy for them as if it had been her own heart that was breaking.

One morning she determined to visit Congressman Ingram, whose interest had been awakened in the case, and try to secure his valuable influence. He listened to her statement with a serious face, and while weighing the young man's claims to a rehearing, was evidently struck by the extreme earnestness of his advocate, and at the same time laying away for future use a little "clincher" for an argument against a woman's entering the professions; "for," he said to himself, "she is too ardent, too sympathetic, too 'put-yourself-in-his-place,' to weigh the matter which she has in hand dispassionately."

With great respect for Miss Marshall, however, he said, —

“I am obliged to go home to-night, but when I return I will do all that I can to assist you. I have some friends whose influence may be obtained. I am acquainted with the Adjutant General, and will see him for you. The case being closed now does not prevent its being reopened at some future time, and I shall not be long away. In the mean time, Miss Marshall, permit me to suggest that you rest quietly for the present, and throw off the burden of other people’s sorrows.”

She tried that night to follow his advice, but could not sleep. Her excited vision seemed to see the pale, set features, the smileless mouth, the stony eyes, and the look of settled despair, that had haunted her ever since her first talk with Mrs. Winchester.

Leo’s disgrace was a heavier grief to his mother than the loss of her husband, whom she sincerely loved and mourned, and for whom she still wore the crapes of widowhood, though many years had elapsed since his death. Time softens such sorrows, but a living disgrace is a hard, material fact which we must meet and bear daily.

Elinor became so strongly impressed that she had personal work to do, that she arose and addressed a letter to the Secretary of War, with a heart-stirring appeal to his sense of justice and his sympathy for other’s sorrows.

She expressed her great surprise upon receiving the letter from the Adjutant General announcing the summary proceedings of the department in render-

ing an adverse decision without giving the applicant's attorney an opportunity to be heard in the case. This done, she retired to rest, and "Nature's sweet restorer" came at her call.

On the afternoon of the following day she received an autograph letter from the Secretary of War appointing the next Wednesday morning for a hearing with him at his office, when she should have full opportunity to present her case. At the appointed hour she was promptly at the door, and was immediately ushered into the great man's presence.

"Good-morning, Mr. Secretary," she said ; "I am very grateful to you for according to me this hearing."

"Miss Marshall," he replied, looking at her very critically, and, evidently seeing nothing like a crank about her, assumed an apologetic tone, — "I did not see the adjutant's letter, and he must have mistaken my meaning, for I certainly never intended you to understand that the case was disposed of without giving you a hearing ;" and he bowed courteously but gravely.

Elinor saw at once that he was addressing the lady, not the lawyer, and said with a quiet dignity, —

"I ask nothing on my own account, sir, but I claim simple justice for my client."

"Oh, I understand that," he replied ; "but have you prepared anything further in the case?"

The substance of Miss Marshall's brief was that the whole case was a flagrant instance of malicious prosecution from beginning to end. The manner of pre-

ferring the charges, she claimed, was illegal and contrary to military usage. It was in violation of United States Army Regulations, 188—, page 131, par. 1335, as follows : —

“Inspectors will take care that no injustice be done to organizations or individuals by reports not fully sustained through personal examination. When investigating reports, allegations, or irregularities prejudicial to the character of an officer, the inspector will make known to him the nature of the accusations against him, and give him opportunity to submit his own statement in writing, which statement shall form part of the inspector’s report. Copies or extracts of all reports reflecting upon the character or efficiency of officers shall be furnished them by the commander to whom the inspector submits his report.” (G.O. 5, 188—; G.O. 5, 1874.)

The young men were denied any personal hearing whatever. She urged two strong points in the “cooked court” and the attempt at blackmailing. She also emphasized the eloquent plea of Judge Percival, and closed with a strong appeal to the Secretary to consider this case as he would wish another to do in his place if the appeal were for his boy and his darkened home.

At the close of the interview the Secretary said,—

“I will see that the President’s earnest attention is called to it. I must inform you, however, Miss Marshall, that at present he feels that the standard of proper military discipline must be maintained in the army, and that any interference on his part would look like an attempt to lower that standard.”

Elinor, well pleased with her morning's work, thanked the Secretary for the time he had given her, and hastened home to find me a guest for once at Dr. Percival's dinner table. We had but just left the table and taken our seats in the parlor when Mrs. Winchester and her daughter came for a short call. As Marion met them, she turned quickly, still holding Mrs. Winchester's hand, and said, —

"My friend Colonel Atherton, Mrs. Winchester ; and Miss Winchester, colonel."

If consternation was ever depicted on a man's face, I think it must have been on mine ; but I covered my embarrassment with as good a grace as I could muster, and joined in the conversation. I soon became aware that Elinor's quick eyes had discovered something amiss, and evidently it did not take her long to decide what it was. She afterwards told me that when she saw the flushed cheek of one lady and the paling lips of the other, it flashed through her mind that I had taken an active part in the proceedings which had resulted in the dismissal of Lieutenant Winchester.

She saw that the charming manner of both ladies had made an impression on my mind, and with her rapid intuitions she revolved within her own how to turn it to account. She believed that I might, if I would, have some influence in army circles, and perhaps be of great assistance in discovering and suppressing the secret opposing forces against which they were contending. She thought this meeting fortuitous, and directed all her energies towards

making the whole company appear at ease while they remained.

After the little stir consequent upon their taking leave, Dr. Percival addressed himself to me as if he thought I understood it all, and said, —

“Colonel Atherton, we are very much interested here in Leo’s reappointment, but there seems to be some adverse influence at work, some one who has the *entrée* of the War Department, and knows everything that takes place there. Have you any idea who it can be?”

“I am sure,” I said, with as much indifference as I could assume, “it would be useless for me to surmise, for it may be any one of many, I suppose.”

I was unpleasantly conscious that three pairs of eyes were upon me, and nervously hastened to add, —

“Lieutenant Winchester has always been the most popular young officer with the ladies wherever he has been stationed, and such a man is correspondingly unpopular with his brother officers. Envy and jealousy influence us all more or less. Winchester’s distinguished appearance, and his insufferable Virginia pride, made him personal enemies; and when the time came when they could injure him, they did it, as they always do.”

“But, colonel,” persisted the doctor, “the whole proceedings in this case were irregular and illegal. They would have been quashed in the outset in any legal tribunal but a court-martial.”

“It was not altogether a fair thing,” I reluctantly admitted; “at least Howland should have been dismissed if Winchester was.”

I was wretchedly ill at ease during this conversation, for I was not yet prepared to take any step in Winchester's favor, although I clearly saw that my friends expected it ; and my own heart and conscience seemed to plead for him. Mrs. Winchester's sorrowful face, too, seemed to remain with me and mutely pray for mercy and aid.

Those who have never known anything of army circles can scarcely comprehend the extent of humiliation which the family of a dismissed officer must suffer. They feel the disgrace equally with the offending party, and it seems utter ruination. To them the army is the great centre around which all other professions are but satellites, and revolve by fixed laws, near or remote, as the case may be.

Marion and I were at last the sole occupants of the room, and her first remark to me was in reference to the same undying subject.

"You see," she said, "how absorbed Elinor is in Lieutenant Winchester's case, and she thinks you could be of great assistance if you would."

I did not permit her to go on. My temper got the better of me for an instant. Between being constantly pricked by my own conscience, and the uncertainty as to how much had been communicated to Marion as to my part in the trial, I was feeling very uneasy, and said hastily, —

"I cannot go anywhere that I do not hear something about this subject. I am tired of it !"

Marion seemed surprised at my petulance, and said slowly, as her eyes rested upon my face, —

"I did not know that you had any cause for per-

sonal sensitiveness on this subject ; in fact, I did not know that you were at all concerned in it."

I winced under her look, for once more she had read the depths of my guilty heart ; but still more impatiently I said, —

"He needed humbling. No man has a right to carry his head so much higher than his fellows."

"And did he?" she asked, smiling at the same time. "He had a right to carry his head erect if he chose, so long as he had done nothing to bow it in shame. Was not his record as good as that of other men in the army previously to this?"

"Yes," I answered shortly, "as far as I know."

"I never could see," she said meditatively, "why he should have been singled out for such extraordinary proceedings as were pursued in his case. He must have had bitter enemies, and yet they tell me that he was, previously to this time, a prime favorite with all as a noble-hearted, generous young man. I have great sympathy for them all."

I was becoming more calm under the influence of her quiet composure of manner, but I asked sharply, —

"Marion, why do you always espouse the cause of some unfortunate sinner, and why does this case particularly interest you?"

"Partly on account of the mother and sister, and partly because Elinor is interested in it."

The mother's saddened face seemed to appear before me, and it was all I could do to retain my calmness as I said, —

"I think you use a mild term when you call such

disgraceful conduct as Lieutenant Winchester's unfortunate."

She looked me gravely in the face, and replied, —

"All sin is unfortunate, whether it be great or small; and he certainly did not voluntarily seek it, if I am correctly informed."

"There is no denying the fact that he was in very disreputable company, and guilty of conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman," I said with some irritability.

With the same even tone and steady manner she asked, as if seeking information, —

"Is Lieutenant Winchester's case so very exceptional in the army? Do all officers always keep such company only as is above reproach?"

"Marion," I said, "it certainly seems exceptional to me that you should have so much sympathy and charity for social sins. Will you tell me why you are so different from every other woman in this regard?"

While I was thus questioning her, I knew that this large-hearted woman had extended to me the same lenity which she showed towards others; but I was too disturbed to be generous.

She patiently answered my question by saying, —

"For a variety of reasons, I presume, if I am really different from other women. I have seen enough in life to make me feel deeply on all important subjects, especially those which affect the home and the family."

"What particular events have ever come within your observation to impress you so strongly?"

"The interest that I feel in these matters has been the result of many years' slow growth," she replied ; "it must have begun, I think, when I was a young girl of sixteen. It so happened that I taught a country school at that time, — that was before papa went into the army, — and it was then the fashion for a country teacher to board around the district and be made the special confidante of the mothers of her pupils. This confidence was frequently, and I may say almost invariably, their matrimonial trials."

"That must have been strange entertainment for a child, for you were scarcely more than that," I said.

"Yes, I think so now, and even then it was unspeakably tiresome ; but I had no alternative. I had to listen, although I had not the slightest interest in those subjects then, and much that I heard was like a dead language to me. I used to think, while listening, that some of the machinery of human life must be sadly out of gear, and not as the great Machinist intended it to be ; but I never gave a second thought to any specific detail."

"Most young girls," I said, "usually treat all such subjects as something not to be spoken of and extremely distasteful."

"It was not especially so with me," she replied. "I was naturally too religious or too carefully educated to be shocked by anything that pertained to the laws of life or any law of God which was ordained for the well-being of His children. I simply felt that I was still too young to consider them ; that is, that the time had not yet come for an interest in such things to come into my life."

"And had you no curiosity to learn more of these laws of life, as you call them, while you had an opportunity?" I asked.

"Not the least," she answered. "I think my life was always so full of what I deemed of immediate importance, that there was no room for curiosity."

By this time I in my restless manner had been moving about the room, and now stood with my elbow on the mantel, looking down upon her, and thinking to myself how different she was from other women. She sat now, as she always did when deeply moved, with her hands clasped in her lap, her eyes shaded by their drooping lashes, and a look of intense earnestness on her firm yet gentle countenance.

"Marion," I said, "you seem to have lived a great deal for your years."

Looking quickly up, as she felt my eyes upon her, she pleasantly replied, —

"I think sometimes that there has been more in each five years of my life since childhood than in the whole of many people's lives."

"I have never met any other woman who could talk as you do upon such subjects, and feel so deeply," I said.

"No, I presume not. I know two other ladies and one man who are equally interested in all that pertains to the laws of social and family life; there are no doubt many others, but I know only these. I believe there will some day be a much-needed revolution in these matters."

"I care not what revolution comes," I said laughingly, "so it sweeps you into my home. Marion,

when will you give me the answer for which I am waiting?"

She looked at me a moment, then with a provoking smile said, —

"When I am satisfied what the answer should be."

I saw that it would be useless to press the question, but my impatience was fast assuming the attitude of despair. I made up my mind then that I must end the matter soon. I was unfit for anything in this state of mind, and only a decided and definite answer would restore my mental equilibrium. Bidding her good-night, I added, —

"I shall see you once more."

CHAPTER XXI.

“ By the laws
Of a fate I can neither control nor dispute,
I am what I am ! ”

Owen Meredith.

IN the course of a few days I learned that Miss Marshall had seen the Secretary of War, who had informed her that the President was of the opinion that he had no power to grant the relief sought in the case of Leopold Winchester ; that in any case he could do nothing until the next West Point graduating class was provided for.

The President was seen with similar results. The argument that no West Point graduate had any claim upon a vacancy made by the unjust dismissal of another, was of no avail in law, though it might be in equity. The President held to the theory that, however unjust the proceedings, Lieutenant Winchester was just as much a civilian now as if he had never been in the army, and the appointment, if made at all, must be made as original.

My leave was drawing to a close, and I had reached the pitch of desperation in regard to Marion. The one feeling continually haunted me, that my future for good or ill depended upon her decision, and I had determined not to see her again until I was armed and equipped for my last plea for what seemed life or death to me.

With this purpose in view, I made my plans for

the evening, and putting on the manner of a man who felt himself already accepted, I sought the place which had become so like home to me.

Outwardly I was calm and cheerful, but struggling manfully to hold myself together within. Marion proposed a walk, but I did not wish to go.

She looked keenly into my face and asked, —

“Hugh, are you ill or tired?”

“Only tired,” I replied.

“Then take this easy-chair, and I will read to you,” she said.

“No, Marion,” said I, “I must talk to-night, for it is our last opportunity before I take my long trip to Fort Deering.”

She started suddenly, and turning her dark eyes upon me, while all the brightness faded from her face, said, —

“Do you really go so soon?”

“I must. I have stayed away from official duties and private business at a season when both should have claimed my attention, simply because I could not leave you,” I said pointedly.

She turned towards me, holding out both hands, and said brokenly, —

“Oh, how can I — ”

I took her dear hands in mine, and answered her unspoken question.

“It need not be so, Marion. You have only to say the word, and we need never be separated again.”

She was as mute as a sphinx. I looked down into her eyes with all the magnetism I could summon to mine. I knew her heart could not resist that look,

whatever her lips might say. It was more than she could bear, and she turned her face as if to flee from some impending danger.

"Marion," I said in a tone which I meant to make irresistible, "do not send me away from you. Is it possible that you still doubt me?"

"I do not doubt your love," she said in a low, earnest voice; "but — forgive me, Hugh — I doubt your ability to be a true and faithful husband. I dare not trust you!"

"Marion, you have frequently hinted the same thing. Will you please explain what you mean?" I said testily.

"Let us sit down," she said wearily; and releasing her hands from mine, she sank on the corner of the sofa, and I took my seat beside her. I tried to possess myself again of her hand, but she pushed me gently away, and held both hands tightly clasped in her lap.

With a deep solemnity of voice such as I had never heard her assume before, she said, —

"I believe, on general principles, that in the close relationship of a wife I could hold true the husband I had won; but all general laws fail when inherited and constitutional tendencies are so marked as yours. Better the present sorrow than the future pain. I could not endure the fate of a neglected wife."

As usual, she had defeated all my nicely laid plans; and I was apparently just as far from the goal of my ambition as when I made my first call. I was but an instant in deciding that this question should be fairly settled between us here and now, so

that, whatever befell us, there should be no future misunderstanding on this point. If she was correct in her premises, I *would* have the proof.

"What makes you think that the conditions to which you refer are constitutional?" I asked kindly.

She looked at me with that far-away earnestness which I had learned to understand, and which meant absolute conviction; then in a subdued tone, as if deeply impressed by the solemnity of the occasion, she said, —

"You once said to me, in a conversation somewhat similar to this, that 'if men and women talked more freely of life and life's uses, there would be fewer domestic infelicities, and a great lessening of the divorce cases which so shock us at the present day.' And now I cannot answer the question you have asked, without taking you into the inner sanctuary of the most sacred laws of life. I can scarcely believe it possible that two hearts — whatever betide, must always beat as one, and if never united here must be united in eternity — can misunderstand each other in a conversation such as they would talk to their own souls. If I speak in this matter it is to your soul I must address myself."

She hesitated, and I said, "You may proceed, the occasion cannot be more sacred to you than it is to me."

Thus encouraged she slowly and hesitatingly began.

"These subjects have the same interest for me that any abstract science would in which I am interested. There is, however, this exception. This is the most sacred of all sciences to me, because it concerns the

best interests of the highest type of God's intelligencies, — the human race ; but it may not interest you, and if you prefer I will drop the subject here."

She looked at me questioningly, and I met her look with one of extreme gravity, and said, —

"I am intensely interested, and I beg your pardon if my manner has seemed to infer any lack of appreciation."

"It is not that," she replied, "but I did not know that you would care as I do."

Rising from the sofa, in the intensity of my feelings I said, —

"You can scarcely conceive what a deep interest this subject has for me. With you it is measured by your general interest in humanity and the needs of the race ; while with me it is a personal matter, as far-reaching in its importance as the limits of time and eternity !"

Pacing the room before her, I continued, —

"I wish to hear all you would say. You are giving me light, and I feel in the face of your reasoning like a benighted heathen. I need all the enlightenment you can give me, and indeed I must have it. I pray you go on."

"Colonel Atherton," she said, "there is a strong uplifting, wonderful force which attracts a manly man to a womanly woman ; such attraction you had for me, and I *thought* I had for you, tempered with genuine respect and appreciation."

"You thought you had, Marion : you had, you have ; and have I not always treated you with respect ?"

"Certainly," she answered. "I have always thought you exceedingly delicate in your deferential manner towards me, but Hugh—" She bit her lips to force back the blinding tears, and in a choked voice added, "disappointed confidence is one of the most unendurable sorrows of life."

As her hand covered her eyes for a moment, I said, —

"Marion, I deserve all this, — it is altogether just, but very hard to bear. No man ever felt more honored by the love of any woman than I have by yours, and I should despise myself if I thought that by act, word, or look I had ever seemed to you to forget to be a gentleman in your presence for one moment. I have justly forfeited your confidence and respect, but could you know all I have suffered, my unavailing remorse, I am sure your great generous heart would relent, and give me one more trial."

"One's heart may do a great many foolish and inconsistent things, if the head which guides does not come to the rescue in time. Only God knows how my heart pleads for you, and not less for myself," she answered with a dry, tearless sob.

She must have read how insignificant all this made me seem to myself, for while I was thinking that such a woman's wifely influence would keep me manly in spite of myself, she recovered her voice and said, —

"Colonel, do not so humble yourself. It is painful to one. I hold you in such esteem as I have never held any other man, but I know your failings,

and how far you are personally responsible for the weakness which has darkened your life, and mine too, for that matter, I do not know."

"And my great sin *is*, in your eyes —" I hesitated.

"A human infirmity and a common weakness among men, but none the less reprehensible. I believe you have fought bravely for a pure manhood all your life, but have ignominiously failed."

These last words she said with trembling lips and swimming eyes.

I had set out to get to the bottom of her thoughts on this subject, at whatever cost to myself, but it was with some effort that I said, —

"Why do you think this tendency to sin is not acquired?"

With great seriousness she answered, —

"When men acquire abnormal conditions by leading the lives of debauchees, they carry with them an atmosphere of grossness and sensuality instead of true manliness. When these conditions are inherited, and combined with strong intellectual forces, the outward signs are not so manifest, but the results are the same. If I believed, as I am inclined to do, that in your case they were thus inherited, I must unhesitatingly reject you, as the hereditary taint would be transmittable from generation to generation, and I should be guilty of an unpardonable sin if I entailed upon my children such a calamity."

Her subject had become so much a part of her whole being that, as she talked, her face looked spiritualized. It cost me no further effort to ask

questions ; it seemed to me as if I was in the presence of a heavenly ministering spirit, instead of a woman of flesh and blood.

"What, then, is your explanation?" I asked.

A flush suffused her cheek and temples as with a voice of sweet solemnity she said, —

"Colonel Atherton, this is holy ground, but the momentous interests involved, — nay, more than this the God-given relationship between the individual souls of two people intended for each other, make it meet that we two should together enter this inner sanctuary of human life."

I was awed by the manner and tone with which she continued, —

"It is from the breast of the mother who gives us life that we inherit that mother's own emotional conditions, to become a part of our own being. If a mother, in ignorance of the laws of life, nurse her babe while in anger, the result to the child may be serious convulsions, and the martyrdom of shattered nerves for an entire life ; or, as in your case, the inheritance may be any other emotional condition of the mother."

A silence deep as death fell upon us for a short space, but we could each feel what the other's thought must be. Each knew that the other was thinking, "God pity us all for the misery, vice, and crime entailed upon us through the sin of ignorance !"

At length I said, —

"If one's own life were all that it involved in such a case as this, the evil would be far less extended,

and I might see the point you make; but, Marion, if you believe me to be free from blame in this matter, why hesitate to put your hand in mine and say, 'All that woman's love can do for the man she loves better than life I will do to make your future honored and respected.'

"Because, —

"The great moral combat between human life
And each human soul must be single. The strife
None can share, though by all
Its results may be known.
When the soul arms for battle,
She goes forth alone.'"

"I believe," she continued, "that you are free from blame as to the cause, but not as to its unrestrained continuance."

"Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?" I asked. "Can a man change a law of his being, established in him before an accountable age, and nursed in his infancy?"

"In a great measure, yes," she said. "We can change our evil tendencies by discipline. It may require the resurrection and a spiritual body to remove them, but with God's help they may be effectually controlled."

Her calmness of manner as she deliberately read my death warrant, it seemed to me, — for I felt that she was slipping beyond my reach, and that there was a great impassable gulf between us, — nearly crazed my brain.

"How can you be so calm," I said, "in presence of my despair? Has your love for me gone out?"

"Tumultuous waters do not indicate great depths below ; my heart pleads for you as only God can know. There is not a thought of my life that you are not a part of. There is no wish of my heart that does not require you to consummate it. There is no pleasure in life which can ever be complete unless shared with you. I do not see how I can face the future without you. I do not see how I can possibly live when I see you no longer."

She bowed her head in her hands, and gave way to a perfect passion of tears.

"Marion, my beloved," I said, "do not send me away ;" and despite her resistance, I strained her to my heart. "Life can have no value to me without you. You alone can help me to be strong."

"Hugh, you must let me go," she said. "Do not make my duty any harder."

"You can have no greater duty than to be the saving half of the man you love. We were made for each other's complement. I need you to influence my life. Let me appease that hungry heart of yours, my dear love, for you need me because you love me."

"Only God is mighty enough for your needs, Hugh, and you will not go to him, but persist in coming to me," she said sadly.

"The best God for a hungry man is a loaf of bread. I am hungry for a manly life, for an earnest, true life, and I want you to keep me true ; without you I am at the mercy of the tempter," I said hotly and hastily.

"If I were your wife I could not be always at your

side. You must conquer the enemy of your life alone with God," she said.

"The days of miracles are past," I answered. "God does not change the laws He has made, and if your theory is true, I am a victim, not a sinner." I was half angry and wholly baffled.

"Perhaps not," she replied ; "but he has provided amply for every real want, and, if you rely on Him, will make a way of escape from every temptation. Until you are fit to be a husband, I cannot be your wife."

I loosed my arm from about her waist, and looking into her eyes with tears in my own, I said, —

"Have you no confidence in me, Marion?"

"Every confidence in your good intentions, but none in your ability to carry them out, so long as you rely upon your own strength. Go to God for help, pray for yourself, and whatever I am doing, morning, noon, or night, I will pray that you may sometime come back to me, such a man as God intended you to be."

"Your prayers would doubtless have some influence, but mine would not," I stubbornly persisted ; "if I am ever saved, it will be through the prayers of others, not mine."

"You rely upon a rope of sand. No one being can stand for another ; His word says, '*Present yourselves blameless.*'"

"I could not be a consistent Christian," I said, "and I will not be a hypocrite."

"You can if your motive is high enough. Not for my sake would I have you seek help from on

high, but for your own, because you must have it or perish."

"That is all very well for you that have never committed sin," I said.

"But God makes no distinction between respectable sin and disreputable sin," she answered. "I have had no great temptations to resist. There is more virtue in an effort to resist temptation, even though one fails, than in doing right in the absence of all temptation. Christ our brother will appreciate your every effort, sympathize with every struggle, and help you to a glorious victory, if you will only let him; will you?"

Her sweet face was raised to mine in tender appeal, and I laid a holy kiss on her fair forehead as I said, —

"I do not know; I have little faith."

I was to leave in the morning, and the hour was late. I arose to go, and taking her hand I said sorrowfully, —

"This may be our last good-by in life. I have no fears that you will forget me."

"I have no wish to forget you," she replied; "the memory of what I once believed you to be is the sweetest of my life."

"Good-by!" I said at last in a husky whisper. "The future is as dark as midnight to me."

Tears filled her eyes, and a trembling "God bless you!" was all her lips could utter as she bowed her head, and her whole frame was convulsed with emotion. I reeled from the room, and felt that I was in a great unfriendly world, — alone.

CHAPTER XXII.

RUTH had rallied when I reached New York. She looked better than when I parted from her a few weeks before with the doctor's assurance that there was really nothing to fear. Though very delicate, she was able to drive a little every day, and it was my pleasure to accompany her.

One morning we had been leisurely driving about Central Park, and just as we were opposite the Metropolitan Museum of Art, a carriage passed us which I recognized as belonging to Mr. Valdemere, and to my utmost astonishment, seated by Mrs. Valdemere was Marion Percival.

I felt that my cheeks were blanching, and with difficulty repressed the extreme agitation that seemed to possess me from head to foot.

Chauncey, the Yorkshire terrier which lay at our feet, seemed, with his dog instinct, to know that something was wrong, for he started to his feet, gave a quick bark, looked me in the face, and seemed ready to spring towards the passing carriage.

Both ladies were looking intently in the direction of the obelisk, and did not observe us.

Marion was dressed in some dark material, and looked more irresistibly attractive to me than I had ever seen her.

"Who was it? what was it, papa? You are so pale, — what has happened?" and her sweet face

quivered with sympathy as Ruth asked these swift questions.

I laid my hand on my child's, and said gravely, —

"Ruth, you remember what I have told you of Miss Percival: she was seated in the carriage which has just passed us. She is a warm friend of Mrs. Grace Valdemere, but I did not know that she was in the city."

My voice was broken with the flood of memories which the unexpected sight of that lovely face had suddenly sent rushing through my heart, — memories not altogether bitter; for the blissful hours I had passed in her sweet company from time to time were precious enough to cherish through all time.

"Is Miss Percival really so dear to you, papa?" Ruth asked.

"My child," I said, "you know how intensely I have always loved you? With the same intensity, in another way, I love Marion Percival."

"Yes, papa," she answered; and then in a low voice said, —

"I see now how selfish I was when I expressed such uncompromising unwillingness that you should marry again. I can realize that it was love of self instead of love for you. I do wish to see you happy, papa, — can you forgive me?" and tears filled her gentle eyes.

"My darling!" I said, "there is nothing to forgive. I believe I was vain enough to feel flattered with your persistent unwillingness to see me love any one but you."

"Yes, you will say that, papa, but I see now that

in some strange way I must have influenced you to the ruin of your happiness ; for — for — you love her yet so well, — that other marriage, I never” — and she looked at me furtively — “quite understood.”

“Never mind that, daughter, we will not talk of it,” I said ; “but have you quite changed your mind ?”

“Yes, papa, it was all wrong. I should have known that your love for a wife would not diminish your love for me. I have discovered that loving my husband conflicts in no way with my loving you ; and baby’s coming into my life shows me that there can be a distinctive difference in the feeling towards husband and child, with no diminution of affection for either. I think I must have been supremely selfish.”

“My precious Ruth,” I said, “I would not have you changed in anything. You are all that a loving daughter could be.”

“Papa,” she said tenderly, “if you love Miss Percival so well, you do not then mean to give her up ?”

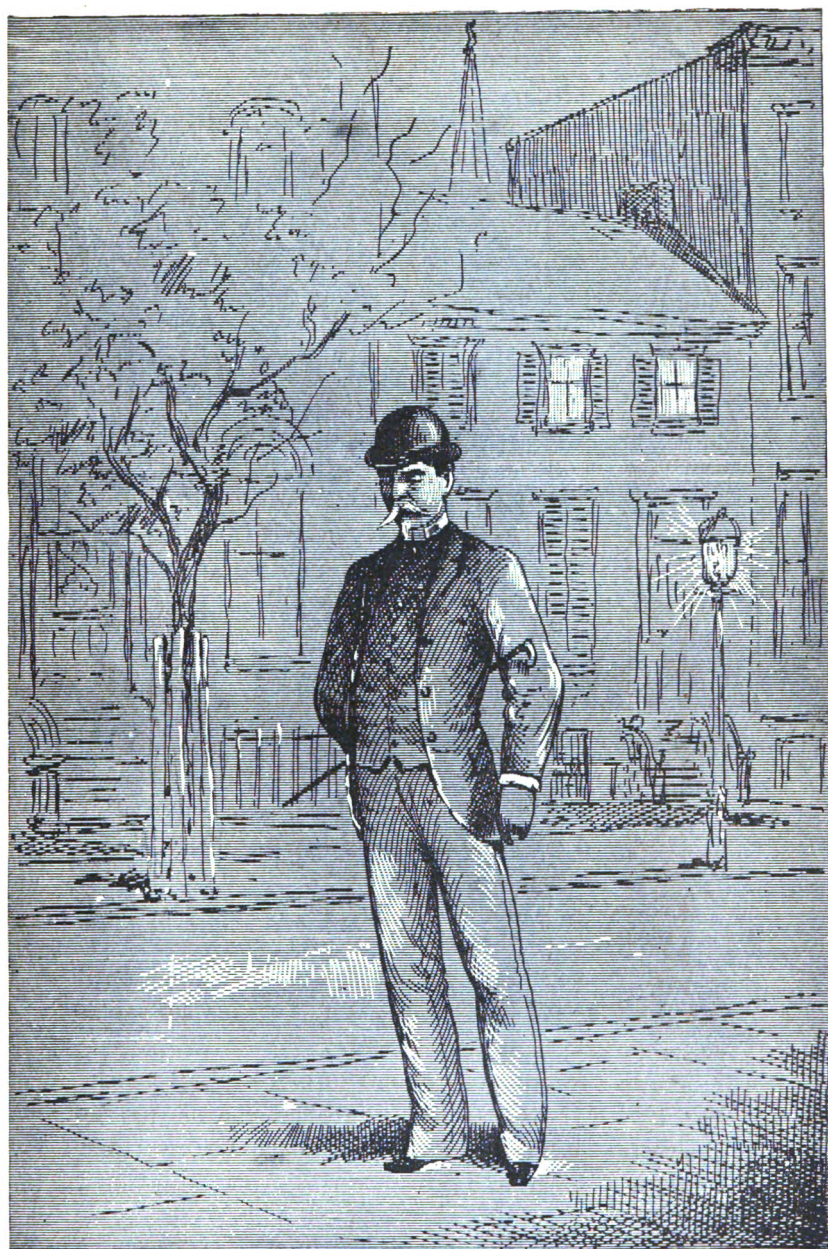
“Ruth,” I answered, looking down into her eyes, “could you give up your husband ?”

She started with a quick shudder, and ejaculated, —

“No, oh, no : that would kill me !”

“So I shall wait patiently, my daughter, until Marion Percival becomes my wife. She must see at last that I do truly love her.”

We had reached home, and lifting Ruth from the carriage, I bore her laughing in my arms to the doorway, and did not release her until I set her small feet down on her own warm carpet.



Walked to his hotel at night dejected. (Page 148.)

Ruth's room, as it was called, a sort of private sitting-room, opened off the library. The two rooms were separated by folding doors, which were nearly always open, and softly draped with heavy Turcoman portières.

The room which Ruth entered was furnished with reference to comfort. An elegant Turkish rug covered the floor, and before the grate lay a large, white Angora-wool mat. The couch was of dark rosewood upholstered in fine olive shades, and before it lay a beautiful soft fur rug, as long as the couch itself. Easy-chairs with foot ottomans, and every costly thing that could invite to comfort or please the eye, were clustered around this favorite resting-place of Austin Clayton's idolized wife.

Ruth removed her wraps, and, as was her custom in these days of weakness, after her daily drive, laid her bright head down upon the luxurious down pillows of the couch, while Chauncey, as if to guard his young mistress, stretched himself on the warm white rug at her feet.

Somehow she could not rest, but, with her delicate hands clasped over her head, began to muse half aloud, —

"I prevented papa from marrying as long as I could, and so he lost her. Ah! it was so cruel of me, but I did not know it. If I could only bring about this happiness he covets now, it would atone!" Then with a sudden thought she exclaimed, "Yes, I will do it!"

Rising from the couch, she drew the easy-chair to a small ebony writing-desk, and rapidly wrote, —

"Mrs. Ruth Atherton Clayton presents her compliments to Miss Marion Percival, asking a personal interview at the earliest time she can conveniently name.

"No. — Madison Avenue, Tuesday."

Ring the bell for a servant, she instructed him to summon a messenger, who was soon despatched with the note, and with instructions to wait for an answer.

With a heart beating anxiously for the result, and a slight misgiving as to what her father would think of her diplomacy, she once more leaned her tired little head on the soft pillows of her couch.

Chauncey was evidently very much nonplussed by these strange proceedings, watching with his bright eyes every movement of his lovely mistress, springing to his feet, and looking eagerly to right and left, with short incipient barks, when she so eagerly moved about the room ; and now, with his little black nose between his fore feet, pointed directly towards her, his intelligent eyes seemed to say, —

"Yes, I'm wide awake, and if anything unusual is going on, I'm ready !"

Half an hour elapsed, and a note arrived which read, —

"Miss Marion Percival acknowledges the compliments of Mrs. Ruth Atherton Clayton, and will be delighted to receive her at ten o'clock to-morrow.

"No. — Fifth Avenue, Tuesday."

When Ruth Clayton came to the dinner table that

day, her fine animation and the rosy glow of her cheek attracted the attention of both husband and father, as with loving glances they looked upon her sweet face and telegraphed to each other, "She is certainly much better!"

She was never in a merrier mood than throughout the entire evening; for she was constantly thinking, "How pleased papa will be if I make it all right!"

The apartments which Marion occupied at Mrs. Valdemere's were a study in art. Mrs. Valdemere knew how to make her guests comfortable and happy, and to this dear friend she had assigned a suite of rooms fronting on Central Park. When Marion arrived at her friend's elegant home, she was ushered along a tessellated hall, up a winding stairway, and into an arched doorway, where, beyond the heavy draperies, were disclosed the luxurious rooms which were to be her own during her stay in the city. The crimson Moquette carpets yielded softly to the foot; the beautiful draperies which half-concealed and half-disclosed the exquisite finish of the doorways, the soft *écru* tints of the ceilings, the warm fur rugs in their natural colors, the carved furniture of antique oak upholstered in rich shades of olive, — all suggested rest. It seemed as if care had never entered here.

"How beautiful!" said Marion to her friend; "but I thought you said you were taking me to my rooms."

"These are your rooms, my dear. Mine are like them, but in different colors, because you know I fancy all the light shades of blue and pink. This is

your book-case, and here is as pretty a little writing-desk as I could find ; but you have not seen all your possessions yet," and she led the way through a softly falling portière into a reception room.

This room had more of a company air, the tints of carpet and draperies were of a more neutral shade, the chairs and sofas were soft as silken plush and brocatelle could make them ; rare etchings and engravings adorned the walls, two or three choice paintings, one by Millet, and one which, the young mistress said, was "thought to be a veritable Titian," gave color to the general effect of cool shades.

A Limoges vase attracted the eye among the choice bric-à-brac ; but Marion paused longest before the one piece of statuary in the room, its spotless whiteness sharply defined by its background of blue plush. It was called "An Easter Surprise," the last Easter gift of Mr. Valdemere to his wife. The lovely infant face, the plump hand and arm making its appearance from one end of a broken egg, while the other end just disclosed a dimpled foot.

Irish point-lace curtains shaded the windows, and half-sash curtains of China silk in lemon color admitted the light without exposing the head of the occupant to the passers-by.

Marion afterwards found the great charm of this room to be the dainty luncheon which greeted her from the brass centre table when returning tired and hungry from shopping excursions or evening amusements. Her thoughtful hostess omitted nothing that could add to her comfort or enjoyment.

Beyond this room was the gem of the suite. A

soft Moquette in amber shades covered the floor, fragile chairs of white and gold, with here and there easy rockers and luxurious upholstery of amber brocatelle, a rest-beguiling couch, a beautiful English bedstead of white enamel and brass knobs, with dressing-case and everything appertaining draped in the same prevailing shade.

Here Mrs. Valdemere left her friend to recover from the fatigue of her journey and wait the dinner hour ; and here in these lovely rooms, surrounded by everything that could bring repose to mind and body, Marion had been for several days when Colonel Atherton saw her driving with her friend in the park, and she, unconscious of his presence, passed on without an accelerated heart-beat.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE evening following the reception of Mrs. Clayton's note, the parlors of Mrs. Valdemere were brilliantly illuminated in honor of her guest, Miss Marion Percival. The list of invitations included the literary and artistic circles of the city, with its wealth and fashion. Mrs. Valdemere laughingly said, —

"No dim religious lights for me, if you please ; it may be æsthetic, but it is oppressive ;" and so the rooms were a blaze of light, reflecting brilliancy from every point of the gorgeously furnished parlors.

Her own style of beauty was of the Spanish type ; and this evening she was dressed in a Worth costume of ruby velvet, with point lace and diamonds, carrying in her hand a large bouquet of her favorite carnations.

Marion was dressed in a creamy, soft gros-grain silk, combined with brocade velvet, diamonds at her throat and in her hair, and a single Jacqueminot rose in her corsage.

Why Marion selected Hugh Atherton's favorite flower for this evening she could not have told. She knew all that Mrs. Valdemere hoped as the result of this visit ; for when the letter came inviting her to her elegant home for a few weeks, it read thus :

"You will find no Colonel Atherton in the charming circle of artistic and literary acquaintances of my

home, but you will be thoroughly appreciated and admired; and should you meet one whom you can love, I shall be rejoiced to have been the medium through which your happiness was secured."

When Marion read this letter, she said to herself, —

"If it is God's purpose that I should bury this unhappy love, this is surely His opportunity to bring it about."

At ten o'clock the guests began to assemble. Mr. Valdemere received them, and turning, presented them to Mrs. Valdemere and Marion, who stood between the two front windows of the drawing-room, in a bower of palms and flowers, with the white hyacinth and carnation predominating. There was no crush; Mrs. Valdemere believed that true politeness to her guests required attention to their comfort, and never invited more than her rooms would comfortably accommodate.

There was a momentary lull in arrivals, when Marion, oppressed by the heat of the room, the perfume of the flowers, and the subtle aroma from the burning joss-sticks with which Mrs. Valdemere had filled her rooms, turned to the open window, when, standing outlined in the blazing light from within, she encountered the magnetic influence of a pair of familiar gray eyes belonging to a gentleman who was just passing under the gas-jet on the other side of the street.

Their eyes met but for an instant. Marion's cheek flushed as she gracefully bowed her head, with a slight movement as if to smell the flower on her bosom, and turning, faced the company with appar-

ently as much composure as if she had only felt the refreshing breeze on her bright cheek ; while in fact the wild beating of her heart showed her that, however she might struggle to escape, she could not meet that heart's master without a thrill of joy or sorrow as unexpected as it was unwelcome, now that she had determined to give him up forever.

The episode was not observed by the company ; but the eyes of her loving friend Grace Valdemere were upon her as she turned from the window, and with quick perception she knew that something unusual had brought that crimson glow to Marion's cheek and the radiant light to her eyes which made her more charming than ever throughout the entire evening.

Mrs. Valdemere presented Judge Castello to her friend for the first waltz ; and as he bowed before her, Marion's quick glance took in his fine form and handsome face, the first of which indicated a grand physique, and the latter an intellect which made him the peer of all the marriageable men in New York. She at once recognized his name as one that had been frequently on the lips of her friend since her arrival. She had been naturally quite anxious to see this paragon of perfection, a lawyer, a millionaire, and a *parti*. He was a fine linguist, and had spent some time in foreign cities. His old Spanish name did not prevent his claim to be a loyal American, though his fine black eyes, hair, and mustache were unmistakably an inheritance from his foreign ancestors. Tall, graceful, fascinating in manner, no wonder that men and women looked upon them as they took the

floor, saying, "What a fine-looking couple!" Judge Castello was always master of the situation in a ball-room, for, however crowded the room might be, his partner was always protected from the slightest collision. He could achieve this successfully in smaller space than any other man in New York.

At the close of the waltz he offered Marion his arm, and, led by the sound of music to the parlor, they leisurely drifted that way. A young lady was seated at the piano, deep in the mysteries of Liszt's "Tenth Rhapsody."

"Miss Percival, have you an ear for music?" said he.

"Not to the extent of being a musician, but I am a good listener to good music such as I imagine this to be;" and she looked up inquiringly.

"Yes, you are right," he said. "Miss Hathaway is one of the most brilliant performers I have ever heard. She is fresh from Carl Klinworth's conservatory of music in Berlin, and New Yorkers have quite lost their heads over her, I believe. Her great power and brilliancy seem enhanced by her charming face and *petite* figure. Such power in so small a creature seems miraculous."

"I presume so. I thought I could not be mistaken in her *technique*. She shows fine culture."

He bent his fine eyes upon the face at his side, and thought, "Here is a *rara avis*: not a color of jealousy in her tone, not a tinge of pedantry. I must know more of her."

With evident reluctance he resigned her to Mr. Winfield, a negative sort of young man, whose name

was next on her programme, and then with a start remembered that he too was engaged for the same dance. He did not lose sight of the face which had so charmed him, and determined to seek her again as soon as she was at liberty.

In the mean time Marion's partner was saying, —

"Don't you think Miss Hathaway is a sweet, pretty girl, Miss Percival?"

"Very sweet and very pretty, Mr. Winfield. I like her music."

"Yes, quite so," he lisped; "all the boys have lost their hearts to her, she's such an enchanting little thing; positively, they couldn't help it, you know."

"What a contrast to the elegant judge!" thought Marion; "and yet this is one of society's special attractions."

She was becoming infinitely wearied, when Judge Castello again appeared to claim her for a visit to the conservatory to see the Egyptian lotus which Mrs. Valdemere had obtained at a fabulous price a few weeks before.

Marion took his arm with a smile and a warmer glance than she intended, for she felt grateful to be released from the inane conversation to which she had been condemned for the last half-hour.

Looking down into her upraised eyes and recognizing her welcoming glance, he mistook it for a warmer feeling, and thought, —

"Is it mutual, then? Does she like me as well as I do her?" and then and there resolved to try to win her.

He had been a great traveller, and talked of the Nile lotus in its native waters, until she could almost breathe its peculiar fragrance. He then took her to Judæa, and its spicy odors seemed to be in the air about them. Persia's rare perfumes were discussed, and time seemed slipping by in an atmosphere of ottar of roses, when the announcement of refreshments brought them back to the present.

Judge Castello paused for a moment, and then, thinking that he might not have another opportunity, said in a low voice, —

"I have enjoyed this hour more than I can tell you here. May I call upon you?"

Marion understood the delicate flattery of his words, and for a moment hesitated, then replied, —

"I do not stay long in the city, but will always be pleased to see the friends of my friend Mrs. Valdemere."

There was no time for further conversation; for Marion, as the honored guest of the evening, was hurried forward to the dining-room, still under the escort of Judge Castello.

Mr. and Mrs. Valdemere were among the *litterati* of the city, and their receptions were a combination of literary, musical, and epicurean perfection. The collation on this evening was furnished by Pinard, and the flowers added beauty and fragrance to the well-spread table.

Conversation became general, and then, in accordance with the custom of this house, toasts were called for. The first was in honor of the charming and brilliant hostess, who laughingly responded in a few

graceful words ; and then Judge Castello proposed the health and happiness of "one who shines pre-eminent among us, alike by the graces of her mind and the beauty of her person ; a lady who, while successfully mastering a profession which popular prejudice reserves for men alone, has yet preserved the true womanly graces which have endeared her to us all.

"Ladies and gentlemen, you cannot doubt to whom I allude. I call upon you to drink with enthusiasm the health of our charming friend, Miss Marion Percival !"

The company arose and drank with true fervor the health of the admired guest of the evening.

Returning to the parlor, a lovely young girl was called upon to render a humorous recitation. The judge read with fine expression a poem written by one of the guests, and Miss Hathaway sang "Annie Laurie."

Marion enjoyed it all, and felt rather than saw the delicate homage which was paid her in this assemblage of fine intellectual men and beautiful women.

When the last guest had taken leave, Marion bade her host and hostess good-night, and retired to her apartments, but not to rest. Removing her dress and unbinding her hair, she selected a dainty muslin gown, put it on, and drawing her favorite rocker before the grate, sat down to think.

The party had been a success. The lion of New York society was figuratively at her feet ; for, to her dismay, he had, presuming on her consent to see him, forestalled the visit by a few quickly spoken

words, to which she had no time to reply, and had left her to expect a more explicit declaration on the morrow.

She did not mean to let it come to this, and was not prepared for the impetuosity of the warm Spanish heart which had waited so long to find a woman worth the wooing, that, once found, he could brook no delay in making known his intentions.

The face seen from the window haunted her; and all the adulation that had attended her, all the admiration of her new friends, could not blot out or dim for one minute the gray eyes and the grave face which she saw for one fleeting moment under the flickering gas-light.

She arose to her feet, and pacing the floor slowly, as was her habit in hours of mental disturbance, she said softly, —

"I suppose they think the evening was full of pleasure for me, that I am flattered with all this! Ah! I wonder if Grace Valdemere, happy in her own marriage, can think for a moment that I would be satisfied with less than a perfect love? No, no!"

So she paced silently for a moment, then in a low musical voice recited: —

"What care I for the tempest?
What care I for the rain?
If it beat upon my bosom
Would it cool its burning pain?
This pain that ne'er has left me
Since on his heart I lay,
And sobbed my grief at parting,
As I'd sob my soul away.

“But what care I for pleasure?
What's beauty to me now,
Since love no longer places
His crown upon my brow?
I have tasted its elixir,
Its fire has through me flashed;
But when the wine glowed brightest,
From my eager lips 'twas dashed.”

A gentle tap at the door brought her wandering thoughts home again, and in answer to her low “Come in!” the door noiselessly opened, and Mrs. Valdemere's bright face appeared. Her long black hair in burnished waves nearly swept the floor, and her loose satin robe of a deep rose color made her look like a tropical flower.

She seated herself on an ottoman, and, drawing Marion to the chair beside her, said gaily, —

“Well, my dear, you have carried all hearts before you. Now who, of all your admirers, pleased you most?”

“Oh, Mrs. Charles Crandall,” she answered quickly, with a sly appreciation of the situation. “I was prepared to find her charming, but she surpassed in grace of manner, beauty of person, and good breeding, anything I could have conceived. I was never more in love with a woman in my life.”

“Now, Marion, you know that is no answer to my question. Of course I did not mean what woman you liked the best,” Grace said petulantly.

“No?” with uplifted eyebrows and rising inflection. “Well, then,” thoughtfully, “I think Alfred Vaughn is more interesting than men usually are. He not only has the versatility of a well-read and

much-travelled man, but he never seems to be wearing a society mask ; is a man of the world, and talks sense to a woman. I think I like Mr. Vaughn very much."

"And what of Judge Castello, Marion? I thought he seemed quite smitten."

A slight flush appeared on the face on which Grace Valdemere's eyes were resting, not from any feeling for Judge Castello, but from the remembrance of his last words and look as he bade her good-night.

"I do not know," she answered slowly. "He is one of your grand men, — a man to be proud of, but not to love."

"Oh, Marion, I am sure you have only to permit him, and he would show you that he could love at all events. You were made to be loved and taken care of."

"I have always thought so, but evidently God does not."

"I don't believe that Providence or fate has anything to do with it. We work out our own lives as well as our 'salvation.' I didn't sit down and wait patiently for Frank Valdemere ; I just tried my best to win him, and succeeded in getting the dearest husband in the world."

"Very good, but you broke more than one engagement because you could not love a man well enough to marry him, until you met the one who is now your husband. Now, with your heart and life so filled, you may meet the most distinguished and fascinating of men without feeling for one moment a

single regret that you are a married woman. If such a time should come to me, Grace, a love so full, so true, —

“He need not ask me yea nor nay,
Nor kneel to me one hour,
But take my heart,
And hold my heart
With a lover's tender power.
And I'll kneel, as needs I must,
And say in proud humility,
Love's might is right,
And I yield at last
To manhood's royalty.”

“But, Marion, no such love can come into your life till you cast the old love out ; and I know that it can be done, for I have done it.”

“So have I ; but it was not love like this, not the supreme love in either your experience or mine. The experience of our lamented, charming, and talented friend, beautiful Helen Vernon, is enough for me. She, after years of struggle, overcame the love of her life, cast it out, and with it all capacity for loving again, and, worse than that, she had so encroached upon her vital powers that she had no strength to resist disease.”

Grace raised her tear-filled eyes and said, —

“I never have felt reconciled to her death.”

“Nor I, Grace ; but I warned her long ago of what she was doing, that she could not deliberately take her heart in her hands and crush it, expecting still to live on. She used to talk to me as you do now ; but I told her that I was religiously opposed to committing suicide by so agonizing and tedious a process,

the result of which must always be paralysis, insanity, or death."

"Nothing that I can say on this subject, Marion, seems to have the least influence with you, and my heart aches to see you wasting your affections on one so unworthy of your least thought, when I know that you might make some grand man supremely happy, and be at least comfortably happy yourself."

"My dear Grace," and Marion's lips trembled with emotion, "I am sorry if I seem ungrateful, and I am pained that you should permit your heart to ache for me. There is no need. I am far happier, even in my hopeless love for an 'ideal,' if you will, than I ever could be in a loveless union with the best man in Christendom; regretting my bonds every time that an unbidden thought of Hugh Atherton flitted through my brain, — nay, more than this, cursing the hour which found me weak enough to yield to such bondage."

"But, Marion, you surely cannot mean to give up every opportunity of marriage for this myth of your imagination; for I cannot help thinking that he is wholly unworthy of you, although I have never seen him. I think, dear, that an unmarried woman without wealth must always have such a struggling life, and I dread it for you."

A curious smile parted Marion's lips as she looked at the daintily clad figure of her friend, marked the sparkle of the diamonds in her ears, which she had not taken time to remove, and the priceless rings on her slender fingers; then glancing around the luxuriously appointed room said gravely and quietly, —

"Sheltered as you are, surrounded by both love and wealth, I do not wonder that you think so; but, my dear Grace, never having known such bliss, and not seeing such a consummation in a loveless marriage, I prefer still to bear the burdens of life's duties unflinchingly to the end. It is useless to urge me, dear, and I know of whom you are thinking. He may be better, truer, handsomer, more intellectual, but, — I do not love him!"

Mrs. Valdemere gathered up the long folds of her sheeny robe, and bending, kissed Marion on the white forehead, bidding her a loving good-night.

The gray dawn of morning was straying in at the windows before Marion fell asleep, still dropping into the rythmical line of thought in which Story voiced the longings of the forsaken Cleopatra:

"Draw round my couch its curtains,
I'd bathe my soul in sleep,
I feel its gentle languor
Upon me slowly creep.
Oh, let me cheat my senses
With dreams of future bliss,
In fancy feel his presence,
In fancy taste his kiss;
In fancy nestle closely
Against his throbbing heart,
And throw my arms around him,
No more — no more to part."

CHAPTER XXIV.

MARION had but just seated herself in the library to look over the papers, when promptly at ten o'clock the barouche of Mrs. Clayton drove up to the door.

Mrs. Clayton alighted, rang the bell, and presented her card. Marion had given special instructions to the servant that Mrs. Clayton was to be shown up to the little study without ceremonious delay. The housemaid, in dainty white cap and apron, accordingly preceded the guest to the door, and as she announced the name, Marion arose to receive her.

The idolized daughter of Colonel Atherton and the woman he loved were at last face to face. Marion extended both hands, and Ruth placed her slender gloved fingers trustfully in those so eagerly stretched out to receive them.

They looked into each other's eyes without a word. The younger one, as she looked upon the attractive face of the gracious woman standing before her and felt the magnetism of her speaking eyes, said to herself, "No wonder papa loves her!" and Marion thought, as she looked upon the frail form and delicate face of Ruth Clayton, that she could already see the shadow of the angel's wings.

Unbidden tears dimmed her eyes as with a strong effort she controlled her voice, and greeted her with—

"I am glad to meet you, you poor fragile flower !"

Ruth replied, in a voice almost inaudible from agitation, —

"I came at once, — as soon as I knew that you were in the city ;" then with hesitation, "Papa and I passed your carriage yesterday in the park."

Her eyes were raised to Marion's face, and she saw the hot blood mounting to the fair forehead, before she controlled her lips to say, —

"Is Colonel Atherton then in New York? I had thought him far on his way to Fort Deering."

"He had only reached Chicago when he heard of my sudden and alarming illness, so of course he returned," said Ruth with a smile.

Marion had by this time drawn the delicate woman to a seat beside her, and with that sweet sympathy which she felt for all womankind, and doubly so for this fading flower, as the daughter of the man she loved, had put her strong arm around the tiny waist, and pressing her to her side, had made Ruth feel that in that presence she might almost hope for health and strength herself.

Marion Percival enjoyed inexhaustible health, and the strong magnetism of her nature seemed to affect all who came in contact with her like a spring breeze.

"Miss Percival," Ruth continued in a low voice, "papa knows nothing of my coming here, but I know that he is unhappy. Of course I did not know you when you passed us, but the startled expression of my father's face, the sudden blanching of his cheeks, convinced me that he had seen some one who was dear to him. I questioned him, and learned, as I sus-

pected, that you were Marion Percival. He told me how he had hastened to you as soon as he was free, how he believed that you loved him, and how dearly he loved you ; but that you had refused his suit and sent him away a lonely, disappointed man. I know that I opposed his marriage at first, and, dear Miss Percival, I feared that you had rejected him because of my opposition. I have learned to think differently, and desire nothing so much as his happiness. I can see now how selfish I must have seemed."

"But, Mrs. Clayton, your father always said that you were not selfish, and that if you were he would care less about it."

"I loved him so — for after my dear mamma's death he was both father and mother to me — that I could not bear to have any one come into his heart and life but Jerry and myself."

Marion looked on the fair flushed face, and said with a grave smile, "I am sure he loves you to the point of worship ;" for she remembered well the long conversation with Hugh Atherton on this very subject.

"I suppose so ; indeed, I have always thought so ; but now I know that loving such a woman as you are would not make him love me less, for do I not love my husband and baby ? These two dear loves have broadened my views of life, and made me less selfish and exacting. I do so long to know that my father is happy before I go, which is my only apology for coming to you, Miss Percival."

The sweet lips quivered and her eyes filled with tears, as she added, —

"I could not die peacefully and know that papa was unhappy."

Marion drew her arm more closely about the frail form of her visitor, and after a moment's waiting for her to regain her calmness said gently, —

"Dear Mrs. Clayton, cannot you and I contract together to pray to God for His guidance in this matter; that He will bring it out all right and restore you to health, while we continue to trust as we pray?"

"Yes, but, Miss Percival, papa loves you so well, how can you help loving him?"

"I cannot!" Marion replied with emotion; "but for my faith in God, I would wish that I could."

"If you love him, Miss Percival, why will you not make him happy by becoming his wife?"

"Pray, Mrs. Clayton, do not ask me to tell you that. I could not. Your father is so nearly without faults that you ought only to know him as faultless."

"But he has no faults, Miss Percival. I am sure there was never any other such man as papa. Do you think that any other man loving you as papa did would have sacrificed himself and the woman he loved to save the life and honor of his ward?"

Marion's head swam for a moment, then she said hastily, —

"What do you mean? Did he do that? Tell me all!" and she seized the slight wrist of the narrator with a grasp that almost frightened her. Her face was deadly pale, and Mrs. Clayton feared that she

was ill or fainting, but soon recovering, she said briefly,—

"Go on; I did not know it."

"What did you suppose could induce him to marry Ethel Grey, then,—a mere child?"

"I never could understand his seeming dishonor in that matter, and I have never been able, Mrs. Clayton, to obtain any satisfactory explanation. It has all been involved in an inexplicable mystery. Colonel Atherton would not talk of it, nor in any way explain."

"Then, Miss Percival, I do not wonder that you have doubted him. I supposed that you must know, for I did not until last evening. But I might have known that he was not the man to betray the secrets of one who loved, trusted, and died for him. He does not even know now that I know anything about it. It was as much a mystery to me as to you. Mrs. Grey came to live with her sister in New York after Ethel's death, and I have occasionally seen her there and at my own house.

"Last evening, after receiving your answer to my note, I was lying idly on my couch and dreaming of the happiness I hoped to bring to my dear father, when Mrs. Grey's card was brought in. I ordered the servant to show her to my room, and not long after she was seated she remarked, —

"I have been reading the Washington papers lately, and the name of Leo Winchester has attracted my eye in connection with his reinstatement in the army. I don't know why I feel so impressed that I

ought to tell you Ethel's last talk with me, but I do, and I have come to-night to get it off my mind.'

"Seeing how excited she was, and knowing how difficult it always was for her to speak of this loved daughter, I suggested that she wait until some other time, but she insisted on telling me at once.

"'Ethel,' she said, 'had for several days seemed to feel troubled about something which she wished to confide to me, and finally, after she had become too weak to speak aloud, she said, "Mamma, I want to tell you something;" and then followed the story of Winchester's love for her, and its passionate avowal on the night of that terrible prostration just before her marriage. It seems that she had long secretly loved her guardian, but as he had never suspected it, she had guarded it well.

"'On this evening, after her decided refusal of Winchester's suit, he seemed to become a maniac in his despair, and in his hopeless raving accused her of giving her love unsought to one who cared nothing for her, and taunted her by naming the man she loved. In terror that her long-guarded secret was discovered, and fearing she knew not what, she sank unconscious at his feet, and knew no more until she found herself in the room alone with Dr. Ranney, Colonel Atherton, and myself.

"'With many stops to rest, and failing speech, she continued to tell me that she feared in some way that this was the cause of Winchester's dismissal, and that some great injustice had been done him. Then she begged me to leave no stone unturned to make Colonel Atherton happy, for she had divined

his secret, and now knew that he had married her from the purest motive that could govern the human heart, — a noble spirit of self-sacrifice — to save her from the malignant tongues of a gossiping garrison, and to prolong her innocent life. She was sure that his heart was in the keeping of another, and as her lovely eyes met mine, she said, "Oh, how that other must have suffered! but I did not know it then, mamma dear, or I would not have accepted the sacrifice. He never told me, but — I think — the eyes of the dying — see more than the well and happy."

"She paused, and I thought I had lost her, then she rallied and said, "He — has been — so good — so good — my husband."

"Hugh's quick step was heard springing up the stairs, as I had hastily summoned him from headquarters, and her eyes lighted with a sudden joy as he entered the room, and with a surprised and tender "My darling!" pillowed her sunny head for the last time on his breast, when she gently fell asleep."

As Mrs. Clayton ceased speaking, both women were in tears — and Chauncey looked at his young mistress with an expression of sympathy in his bright eyes, as if he would cry too if he were anything but a dog.

Marion's voice trembled as she tried to speak, and at length forced herself to say humbly, —

"I have done your father great injustice, Mrs. Clayton, and I regret the ignorance of the truth in this matter. In all things else I have never met any other man so unexceptionally honorable and noble,

and now, thank Heaven ! he stands exonerated from all blame."

A power beyond myself had impelled me this morning to visit Marion. I was surprised to see standing at the door the carriage of my daughter, but I did not hesitate to go in, and hastily ringing the bell, I said to the servant who opened the door, —

"I wish to see my daughter, Mrs. Clayton, and Miss Percival, at once."

My imperious manner seemed to amaze the domestic, and in a dazed sort of way she did exactly what I desired, took me directly to Marion's parlor.

Ruth had arisen to take leave, and as both turned towards the door as I was ushered in, I saw the traces of tears on the two faces I loved.

"What is this?" I said, "a secret conspiracy?"

"No, papa, a compact," replied Ruth cheerfully, and turning she kissed Marion, who returned the greeting with warmth, while she stepped immediately forward to give me her hand in welcome.

Something in her upturned face, such a look of ineffable love as I had almost despaired of ever seeing again, thrilled me with such rapture that I bent and kissed her willing lips, thus once more sealing our silent betrothal.

I accompanied Ruth to the carriage.

"Shall I take you home, daughter?" I said.

"Oh, no, thank you, papa, I prefer Chauncey to you this time," she answered with a merry twinkle of her bright eyes.

I returned to the parlor, knowing that something had wrought a great change in Marion's feelings, and determined now to know all.

She met me at the door, and passing my arm around her waist, I said tenderly, —

"Now, my beloved, tell me that I am not mistaken, that I have my wife at last."

She stood in an attitude of deepest humiliation, and while she did not repulse me I knew there was something still to meet.

She raised her eyes to my face, and said sadly, —

"Hugh, I have wronged you ; can you ever forgive me?"

"Yes, my darling, before I know how you have done so, if you love me ;" and I looked into her gentle eyes, pressing her closer to my side as I did so. "Marion, is it so? I long to hear you say it, dear."

"Oh, Hugh, I do, I do!" she sobbed on my shoulder.

I drew her to the sofa, and seating myself by her, waited for a calmer moment, and then said, —

"Now let me hear about it, Marion."

"Hugh, your precious daughter has been telling me of your great sacrifice to save the life of the frail girl entrusted to your guardianship."

I was thunderstruck.

"How could Ruth know anything about that?" I asked nervously.

"It was Ethel's dying revelation to her mother of Winchester's declaration of a love which she could not reciprocate, and of his frenzied despair, in which

he charged her with giving her love to you unsought; and she knew no more till surrounded by the family and her physician."

"Great God! what have I done? Poor boy, he only sinned in loving her too well."

"What is it, Hugh?" she asked.

"I have grossly wronged Winchester, I fear;" then my frail young wife seemed to rise before me, and I said, —

"Poor Ethel! the child literally starved to death, hungering for a love I could not give, for you had won it all, my Marion."

"And I have made such a poor return, Hugh, for your great love," she said sadly. "A woman's love should be so sublime in its loyalty, so strong in its immovable faith, that nothing can cast a shadow between it and the object of its worship, yet I have doubted you when others were true."

Tears of contrition filled her beautiful eyes, but I softly kissed them away and told her how very dear to me was every word and look which proved her restored love and trust.

Just then a rap at the door made us aware that time was passing, and upon opening it a special delivery letter was handed to Marion, while at the same time a telegram was brought to me by Ruth's trusty house servant.

Marion's letter was from Elinor, containing a confession from Winchester of the same facts which Mrs. Grey had communicated to Ruth, and appealing to her to seek me out and induce me to withdraw my opposition, or the bill would probably fail within

three days, costing Mrs. Winchester her life or reason.

My telegram was from Lieutenant Howland, then on leave in Washington, and as follows : —

"The Queen is here. She will disclose something in the Winchester case."

There was no time to be lost, and assuring Marion that I would go by first train to Washington, I left her with my betrothal kiss on her lips and the light of love and trust in her happy eyes.

I walked rapidly to a telegraph station and sent this despatch to Elinor :

"Shall be in Washington to-night. Will aid you all I can."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE West Point class was provided for, and Elinor decided on making a final and personal application to the Chief Executive. She accordingly visited the White House, and was soon admitted to his presence.

He graciously smiled upon her, and she, with less trepidation than she had expected, found herself able to say, —

"Mr. President, you will think I am persevering and persistent, I fear, but I am personally as well as professionally interested in the case of Leopold Winchester, and I cannot conscientiously leave any method untried to bring about his reinstatement."

"Yes," he said pleasantly, with a little nod of the head, "I should work just as you do, I think, if I were in your place ; but, pardon me, I think also that you hardly appreciate the difficulties of the position. You see but one side of the question."

"Excuse me, Mr. President, in my opinion there is but one side ; may I present that as it appears to me ?"

"Certainly," he replied.

"Here is a young man born in the army, sent to boarding-school at not more than ten years of age, because his father thought the army no place to bring up his boy, — thus making the mistake of sending him away from the pure home influences

which his refined and gentle mother would have thrown around him, — educated with boys, without the standards of integrity which he would have been taught in a Christian home: is it any wonder that he is somewhat indiscreet and easily led into irregularities? I once asked him how one of his refined and cultivated tastes could take any pleasure in such low associations. He hung his head in shame and said, 'Miss Marshall, it is all a matter of home training. I never had any after I was a boy of ten, and I have never known any social code but that of men of the world.'

"Then, Miss Marshall, what guarantee have I that, if the young man is restored, he will not again disgrace his position?"

"If you will permit him to do so, Mr. President, I think he can reassure you on that point. This lesson has been a bitter one, but salutary enough to ensure a changed life."

The President had listened as courteously as though a Cabinet Minister's wife had been regaling him with "airy nothings;" but now assuming a judicial air, said in a decisive tone, —

"Miss Marshall, if I had the power to dismiss Howland I would make quick work of your case. It is my duty to protect the military discipline of the army."

Elinor bowed her head and said, —

"But you have not that power, and now the nearest approach to 'even-handed justice' that you can make is to restore Mr. Winchester. There is abundant precedent for it. General Weldon's son has

been twice restored, and his offences were crimes instead of misdemeanors."

Elinor smiled afterward as she recalled the didactic tone in which she suggested to the President his duty ; but she was so thoroughly in earnest that the high station of her hearer was forgotten.

With an indulgent and somewhat amused smile the President said, —

"My sympathies are with your side of the case, but my duty seems to lie in another direction."

"But," she insisted, "the illegal manner in which the prosecution was conducted, and the packed court, ought to weigh something in Mr. Winchester's favor."

"That does not alter the fact that the conduct of those young men is a reflection upon the honor of the service. The only point which I see at all in favor of your side of the case is that Howland ought to have been dismissed, and was not ; but that does not help the other side of the question very much."

He looked her gravely in the face as he said this, and Elinor felt that there was but one thing more to urge as a final appeal. Her whole soul had become interested in the cause she represented, and in a voice of trembling earnestness, which none could hear unmoved, she said, —

"If there is no other argument which can move you to favorable action, let me beg of you to consider his sainted father's untarnished record. His quarter century's patriotic devotion to the service which cost him his life ought to be of some value to the son. If that is not sufficient, let me remind you, sir, of the anguish of the widowed mother, whose own health

was undermined by the hardships she encountered with her husband on our western frontier, and that she sits now in her loneliness and desolation, feeling that her country's hand is hard upon her in this hour. She had hoped that Leo would be the staff of her declining years, but the country for which his father died is affixing to his name the indelible stamp of an everlasting disgrace."

The deep feeling, the unsteady voice, the earnest manner of Miss Marshall, as well as the arguments she used, made a deep impression on the President. With evident feeling, he said, —

"Miss Marshall, you may bring me a concise sketch of the father's life and public services, and I will see what I can do."

She immediately took her leave, knowing that she had already been given a much longer interview than she had expected.

Dr. Percival consented to present Lieutenant Winchester to the Secretary of War, who received him kindly and questioned him closely in regard to the particulars of his dismissal.

Leo, who had known nothing of any life but army life, with its "ranks" and "superiors" and "inferiors," was surprised that the Secretary did not treat him with condescension. When he reached home he said, —

"Mother, the Secretary of War is a gentleman in every sense of the word. He made it as easy for me to explain the situation to him as my own father could have done."

Soon after this Elinor induced Dr. Percival to

present Mr. Winchester to the President, that he might have an opportunity to make his own promises for the future.

The President received him cordially, led him to speak of himself, questioned him a little, and in all ways treated him with the greatest kindness. Before dismissing him, he said, —

“Mr. Winchester, I think I understand your case. I have read the official proceedings twice, the briefs, and all the informal history of the case furnished me by Miss Marshall. This alone took me far into one night. I will do the best I can for you.”

Leo was deeply moved, and voluntarily gave the assurance which the President had refrained from exacting.

“Mr. President,” he said, “if you will reappoint me, I promise upon my honor as a gentleman that you shall never have cause to regret it.”

Elinor’s social position as the niece of Dr. Percival, no less than her own personal qualities, gave her many influential friends among military men, department officials, cabinet ministers, senators, and congressmen. Many of them were more or less enlisted in the cause. Those with whom she was well acquainted invariably said, —

“I will do all I can to secure the President’s favorable action, simply because you are so interested, Miss Marshall.”

Thus the case seemed to be progressing favorably when a new complication arose in Lieutenant Howland’s application for the restoration of his own files,

by the same instrumentality that should secure Winchester's reappointment.

This the President deemed it his duty to refuse, and as Howland had secured all the influence which had at first opposed Winchester, but had later withdrawn the opposition, the President's action in the latter case was again at a standstill.

The friends of Lieutenant Winchester finally decided to relieve the President of all responsibility in the case by securing an enabling act from Congress.

Congressman Ingram took charge of the case in the House, while Senator Willing assumed the same position in the Senate.

There was but one official copy of the court-martial proceedings, and this was given to Congressman Ingram to use first with the military committee of the House, and to be carried from there to the military committee of the Senate.

Congressman Ingram introduced the bill in the House, when it was referred to the military committee. Senator Willing introduced it in the Senate with similar results.

The House committee referred the bill to a sub-committee of which Congressman Ingram was chairman. This committee was nearly through with the copy of the proceedings, and were about to make a favorable report, when an adverse report from the sub-committee of the Senate, to whom the bill was referred, was brought in.

No work had been done with this committee, no papers had been examined: what could it mean?

Mrs. Winchester was so prostrated by this news that her friends were seriously alarmed about her.

General Husted had called at her house three times during the week, and in his most insinuating manner had talked of the influence he had with Senator Willing, and many others interested in this case.

He could "do anything" he wished with the War Department, could wind them all around his little finger and put them in his vest pocket.

There is no doubt that General Husted had determined to have a mortgage on Mrs. Winchester's home for two thousand dollars or defeat this measure.

It is positively certain that Lieutenant Winchester had avowed that he would saw wood for his daily bread before he would accept the restoration of his sword through the influence of this soulless villain.

When General Husted was in the army he had been dubbed with the fictitious title of "General" because he was the champion gambler of the regiment. His special business in the army seemed to be prosecuted at the gaming table.

When the post chaplain would make his rounds of the soldiers' quarters after each pay day, finding the bright silver dollars piled on the table which he had won from the men, he would reply to the chaplain's remonstrances in the most nonchalant manner, —

"But you see, chaplain, I am the philanthropist of the regiment. The soldier is good for nothing after pay day till his money is gone. All the officers are glad when they again have empty pockets, and I just hasten the soldier's return to duty."

Unaccountable as it may seem, gambling has never been made a military offence.

Having served the five years for which he enlisted, and amassed a considerable fortune, General Husted had come to the nation's capital to carry on a different species of gambling.

By his insinuating manners he had been enabled to woo and win a charming society lady, and to set up an establishment where he delighted to entertain those whom he hoped to make useful in his new field of intrigues, for he had become the most unconscionable and heartless of lobbyists.

While the trial of Winchester was progressing at Fort Deering, an item was published in one of the Washington papers to the effect that Lieutenant Winchester's offence was that of betraying the young daughter of a brother officer; this paper, with the item marked, had been mailed to Mrs. Winchester. The handwriting of the address was found to be a fac-simile of that of General Husted.

This newspaper item was evidently intended to create prejudice against the case in the army circles of Washington.

When it was discovered that General Husted had been dining the Senate military committee at his beautiful home, it was not difficult to explain the adverse action of the sub-committee.

General Husted's conduct in the Winchester case was incomprehensible to all except Miss Marshall — to whom Mrs. Winchester's affairs had been confided — and the family of Mrs. Winchester, and those who

knew his utter want of principle and his strong devotion to Colonel Atherton.

Mrs. Winchester had been educated in the strictest school of Southern conservatism under the old regime. It was constitutionally impossible for her to confer with public men in any matter. Therefore she had no alternative but to employ an attorney in all business matters.

When Leopold Winchester was first appointed to the army, General Husted was the "influential Congressional attorney" employed by Mrs. Winchester to transact all business in connection with his appointment and confirmation.

She knew nothing then of his unscrupulousness or of his disreputable war record ; but when the various bills for services, real or pretended, had been paid, they aggregated a fabulous sum.

However, the general assured her that the case could never have gotten through in any other hands, and that he had made unusually liberal terms to her for such services.

Mrs. Winchester believed all this and was satisfied, and continued to employ him in other business transactions. The proceeds of Colonel Winchester's life insurance was first invested in Washington city lots.

An advantageous sale of the same was afterwards negotiated and the proceeds invested in government bonds.

When Mrs. Winchester decided to make a home in Washington she gave General Husted a power of attorney to do her business.

During a temporary absence of Mrs. Winchester

from the city, General Husted resorted to a daring attempt to defraud her of her entire fortune. This was discovered by Lieutenant Winchester, who was in Washington on leave of absence.

A stormy interview between General Husted and Lieutenant Winchester followed, in which the latter branded the general as a coward and an infamous scoundrel. Lieutenant Winchester opposed all compromise short of criminal prosecution.

The mother, however, thought securing her money more practical than facing a future of penury to punish the criminal.

The evidence against General Husted was such that prosecution meant nothing short of the penitentiary.

General Husted raised the money, but before the termination of these transactions he had twice perjured himself and had tried to induce Mrs. Winchester to take a false oath and to forge the date of a legal document. In this connection the general had also swindled Mr. Gay, a Washington real-estate dealer, out of several thousand dollars.

Miss Marshall secured an early interview with Senator Willing, stating the case in all its bearings, as she had so often done before.

"Your story is very different from the one General Husted tells," the Senator said to her.

"All I ask, Mr. Senator, is your promise to examine the record proceedings," was Elinor's response.

This promise was readily given, and in due time the case was recommitted and a favorable report rendered by the Senate committee.

In due time the bill was reported from the committee to the House, with the recommendation that "the bill do pass."

On motion of Congressman Ingram, the following Friday was fixed upon for the discussion of the bill and its final passage.

The galleries of the House were densely packed with the friends of Mrs. Winchester, and the friends of those congressmen who had prepared speeches, either for or against the bill.

Congressman Ingram opened the discussion in an eloquent speech which won the sympathy of all hearers.

The adverse speeches, which were interspersed with those which followed, failed to change the favorable impression made by Mr. Ingram's convincing oratory.

The applause in the galleries was so great at the close of the speeches in the bill's favor that the speaker was obliged to make vigorous use of his gavel, and say, —

"The sergeant-at-arms will be called upon to clear the galleries if order is not maintained."

When the vote was taken on the passage of the bill it was found to have a majority of fifteen in its favor.

The following day was the bill's day in the Senate. Senator Willing led the discussion, dwelling emphatically upon each point, the illegal methods of procedure, and the discrimination in the sentences in the two cases.

He spoke of Colonel Winchester's patriotism, his



He talked of the Nile lotus in its native waters. (Page 211.)

sacrifices for his country, and his untarnished record. He closed his address with a touching appeal for the widowed mother, who looked to them to render justice to her son, and to restore happiness to her darkened home.

The audience in the galleries was visibly affected, and Senator Willing sat down in the midst of hearty applause.

Among the Senators who followed was the Hon. J. Grosbeck, a man who had worked his way into the Senate by manipulating the baser elements in the ward politics of a great city. He had a constituent who desired to see his son appointed to the army, and Senator Grosbeck reasoned that if Winchester could be defeated, the chances for his constituent would be one better by that vacancy.

He became suddenly possessed of a tender conscience in regard to the morals of the United States Army, his gestures were wild and fierce, and with a vigorousness unknown to the dignity of the Senate he talked of the necessity of army officers having characters above reproach, and preserving their military cloth from contamination.

He spoke of his sympathy with the afflicted family, and was affected even to tears as he declared that his heart was with the accused young man; but he believed that some one must be made an example of to put an end forever to such dereliction from the path of duty. He closed by saying, —

"Others can do as they please, but I cannot conscientiously vote for the measure," and took his seat in a state of mental and physical exhaustion.

During this speech it was noticed that Senator Willing was called out, and returned again looking somewhat agitated.

The speaker's voice had not died away before he was on his feet.

"Mr. President," said he, "I ask unanimous consent to add some important testimony that has just been made known to me in this case."

The privilege being granted he continued, —

"While the able Senator was speaking, the card of the colonel commanding at Fort Deering when Lieutenant Winchester's trial and dismissal occurred was brought in to me. Going to the Senate reception room to meet Colonel Atherton, I was introduced by him to a beautiful woman. This woman in a few words told me the tragical history of her own darkened life. She was no other than the Queen of the Winchester trial."

In an impressive voice Senator Willing told the story of this accomplished woman, bred to luxury in a New York city home, won and wedded by a Princeton student while he was occupying a city pulpit as vacation supply.

"This wolf in sheep's clothing," continued the Senator, "soon proved false to his holy calling, false to his manhood, false to his marriage vows. The wife in her madness and desperation, to drown thought, and revenge on all men for the perfidy of one, joined the ballet, determined to entice to their ruin all men who crossed her path.

"Lieutenant Winchester was wholly impervious to her snares until she learned his secret from Mariano

Gonzales, who was passing Colonel Atherton's parlor window and heard Winchester's declaration of love, the lady's refusal, and his taunting reply that she had given her love to Colonel Atherton unsought.

"The night of the escapade the Queen had goaded Winchester to madness by telling him that she knew of his love for the woman whom his colonel had been 'forced to marry,' and of her 'scornful refusal' of his suit, with threats that she would expose the whole story.

"Winchester immediately commanded her never to take the names so dear to him upon her polluted lips again, branding her with her own infamy, and threatening to have her arrested if she dared to mention the name of his colonel or that of his wife.

"In a paroxysm of rage she drew her revolver and shot him. He fell, and supposing that she had murdered him she instantly fled under an assumed name. The remorse of murder on her soul restored her to her better self, and she returned to her mother's sheltering arms.

"She heard nothing more of Winchester until two days ago she saw an item in the 'New York World' in regard to this case. She took the first train to Washington to see what she could do to repair the great wrong which had been done him.

"Registering at the Ebbitt, she met and recognized Lieutenant Howland; a telegram was despatched for Colonel Atherton, who brought her at once to the capitol."

The Senator paused, greatly overcome.

"I need only add," he continued in a husky voice,

"that each of you who has a mother, wife, or daughter must applaud the heroic courage which submerged self to protect pure womanhood from the notoriety of connection with a public court-martial. It was in defence of his colonel and that colonel's wife that Lieutenant Winchester became overwhelmed with public infamy, private scandal, and social ostracism."

The Senator sat down, in the midst of a stillness deep as death.

The vote resulted in the unanimous passage of the bill.

The bill became a law.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LETTERS from Fort Deering brought news of the engagement of Lieutenant Stuart and Ella Dowd. Young Stuart had developed into manhood very rapidly under the severe experience of his detail duty at Cannon Ball Butte Cantonment.

A blizzard closed the road for the winter within five days after the arrival of the troops at their post. The little detachment was reduced to the melting of snow for cooking and drinking purposes, as the only alternative was alkali water. Their only fuel was green soft wood dragged through the snow from the woods near by.

The same mail brought a bright letter from Jerry, brimming over with his happiness in school, and also a note enclosed from his teacher commending his good conduct and rapid progress.

Mr. Gay had retired from the real-estate business some time before the passage of the Winchester bill, and through Senator Willing's influence had secured a position as secretary of an important Senate committee.

In this capacity he had ample opportunity to avenge himself on his old adversary, General Husted, by defeating his measures.

The day following the passage of the Winchester bill an altercation took place between these two men in the corridor of the Capitol.

Mr. Gay had just defeated Husted's pet measure of the session, involving thousands to Husted. He was desperate and goaded to madness by the exultations of Gay. Husted followed Gay into the street, cursing and threatening. And in the street Husted made a lunge for Gay, who gave him a return blow which felled him to the earth. He struck his head on the stone coping, causing concussion of the brain and instant death.

Well, Marion married me! We had a simple, quiet wedding, marred only by the absence of my daughter Ruth, who was still too delicate to take the short journey from New York to Washington.

Mrs. Valdemere came on for the wedding, being the only guest outside the family, and she had been so true a friend that Marion felt the ceremony would not be complete without her. The bright little lady was quite reconciled to the marriage after she had seen and talked with me, finding me not so bad as I had been represented. Indeed, I think she quite took me into her good graces when she found how dearly I loved my Marion.

After the wedding breakfast we took the limited express for Chicago, thence to St. Paul.

From this point an excursion given by the general passenger agent of the road formed a part of the regular train.

The excursion party of fifty represented seven States and a Territory. No pains were spared by the officials of the road to make the trip a pleasant one. We were fortunate enough to enjoy all these

special privileges ; and in any circumstance the journey would have been to me a most perfect one, for was not Marion beside me, — my wife ? and did not her dear eyes meet mine with perfect love and trust ?

By prearrangement we crossed the "Bad Lands" track in the middle of the day. At this point this singular formation is twenty miles across. It is said that General Sully, in speaking of the Bad Lands a few years ago, said, "They look like the bottom of hell, with the fires put out."

My Marion could not accept this theory, for to her this wonderful section was but another evidence of the majesty and power of God.

"Hugh," she asked, as soon as we entered this curious tract, "what are these 'Bad Lands' ?"

Turning towards the window so as not to lose the view, I said, "They seem to have been waste beds of coal, and were, according to the best theories of the day, fired by spontaneous combustion. As the coal burned, the earth dropped down. A water-course was formed, and in its mad rush for the Missouri or some other outlet, cut away the earth, forming the ravines and gullies which you see. In places where the coal failed to burn, the earth was held in the form of conical, square, long, and other shaped buttes."

"Are they good for anything?" said Marion.

"I believe that some parts of them are considered very desirable for grazing purposes, where you see those beautiful plateaus covered with a wreath of green, contrasted with the little gray hills of clay. The clay is sometimes found in its native state, and

sometimes burned, forming scoriæ. You will find an abundant field for your imagination, my dear, in passing through here."

My statement was soon proved a true one, for Marion exclaimed, —

"Oh Hugh! do you see that city with turrets, and domes, and towers?"

Then I called her attention to what looked like innumerable castles.

"See, Hugh," she said, "all those crumbling walls and masonry;" then excitedly, "and just do look, Hugh, at that collection of weather-beaten statuary."

Pointing from the opposite window I said, —

"You must look on both sides, Marion; see that great cathedral dome standing on the ground as if a cyclone had displaced it from its original position; and beyond are the ruins of an old fort."

Marion imagined that she could see everything she had ever heard or read of in these strange formations of clay, sandstone, scoriæ, and hematite, deriving their peculiar shape from the action of fire and water in long-past ages.

"Hugh, what is that smoke?" Marion asked as we came to the coal beds which were still burning.

Bright as the day was, we could see distinctly at one point a volume of smoke rising as it might from a half-extinguished prairie fire.

"I think," I said, "that it must be a smouldering volcano on a small scale. I have seen a blaze of fire issuing from the buttes near the railroad track when I have passed this way before."

"My husband," she said, laying her dear hand on

mine, "how mysterious it seems! I am awestruck with it all; I am full of thought, but cannot think. Do you know anything more about it? I feel as if I must find out some way what caused it all."

"It is believed," I said, "that these prairies were once covered with heavy timber, which became permeated with the silica from the water and were petrified."

The train stopped, and the passengers alighted to collect specimens from the large petrified stumps of these early forests, which were close by the railroad track.

"Where do these come from, Hugh?" Marion asked.

"I do not know definitely," I said, "but there is a petrified forest very near here, and it is supposed that the trees became covered by drifting earth and were carbonized, forming these coal or lignite beds. Some of these stumps have been found which were solid stone."

One of the passengers at this time found a specimen suggesting a human ear, another what seemed to be a child's foot, the whole foot and ankle being as perfect as if cast in bronze. Marion procured specimens of petrified meat, bone, wood, and shells. Some of these beds of lignite, we were told, had been found in the drift formations of Minnesota, and some had been carried by the water hundreds of miles away.

At some points, aggregations of small fossils were found in such quantities as to form beds of lime, containing curious specimens resembling fish, worms,

and bark. From the sand bars of the Yellowstone we procured a variety of agatized specimens, also of the brittle yellow stone from which the river takes its name.

We reached Fort Deering in due time, where I installed my household queen. The festivities which followed at the post, in the form of luncheon, dinner, and reception in honor of the bride, I thoroughly enjoyed, because it was paying homage to Marion.

In her sweet companionship I spent many happy hours, when we talked of the past, our course of true love, — and Lieutenant Winchester's trial. Poor fellow, he still keeps bachelor quarters in memory of Ethel Grey.

In time there came a boy into our home who was the very image of Marion. I was happy. Home, wife, child, — what could I ask for more?

One evening before the lamps were lighted, and after the cradle song in the voice I loved was hushed, telling me that little Hugh was asleep, I heard a gentle tap at my door; and as I responded to the well-known sound, the door was quietly opened and Marion said, —

"Papa, are you very busy, — too busy to be interrupted?"

"I am never too busy to welcome you, my love," I said, and drew her to her seat upon my knee. She was more beautiful to me as mother than she had ever been as maiden or wife, and a peculiar loveliness seemed to glow from her features and look out from

her beautiful eyes, as she rested her hand upon my shoulder and waited for me to speak.

"What is it, dear?" I asked.

"I have come, Hugh," she said, "to talk a little, if you will, of the new responsibility that has come to us, the most important as well as the sweetest we can ever share together."

I winced a little at this, for I thought that she had been disappointed in me; so I asked hurriedly, and with a closer clasp of my protecting arm, —

"Marion dear, have I failed in my desire to make you happy?"

"Oh, no, Hugh," she said, as she laid her face against mine, and then nestled her head upon my shoulder; "but," she continued, "I cannot go before my God in the last day to answer for neglecting our boy in those things my profession has taught me are now sadly omitted in the training of boys."

"If some of the mothers who have sent their boys to me professionally (with the private request to talk to them), could have seen their looks of hopeless despair after such talks, that look would have haunted the mother while she lived."

"When the laws of life have been explained to them, these poor unfortunates have said, 'Why could not some one have told me these things before it was too late?'"

"Many good but ignorant mothers have by this omission ruined the lives they would have died to save."

"What I wish to say this evening, however, is this: If a mother varies ever so little from the beaten

track of conventionalism, even in the training of her own children, she must have the sympathy of the father, as well as his hearty co-operation. The present system of home training is unwise, to say the least."

Marion had been talking with great earnestness, and I was curious to get her notions on this subject ; so I asked her, —

"In what respect is it wrong?"

"One mistake," she replied, "is in the assumption that ignorance is innocence ; another, the lack of proper home influences. Indulgence is the rule, and discipline for the duties and responsibilities of life the exception. One significant wrong is the difference in the training of boys and girls, the latter being instructed in the importance of all the amenities of life, while boys, because they are boys, are permitted to pursue their own way unrebuked."

She paused, and I asked with reverent tenderness, —

"What new hypothesis has my Marion formed in this matter?"

"Something like this," she said ; "that if the home training of the boy and the girl must differ, more care should be expended on the former than on the latter."

"Why, my darling !" I interrupted, "how can you justify a theory like that?"

"When womanhood is reached, Hugh, the girl comes to it usually with pretty well regulated ideas of the necessity of a pure life. She has been taught that public opinion demands a woman to be absolutely above reproach, while there is no such standard for

men. A boy really has no chance in the world morally, while he must stand before the same bar in the final judgment that his sister does."

"Do you not think that the Christian home, the Sunday school, and the church, ought to effect all you would do?" I asked.

"It never has," she replied; "a large proportion of the desperadoes of the frontier come from the Christian homes and Sunday schools of the East."

"How do you account for that?" I questioned again. "Is Christianity then a failure?"

"By no means," she answered; "but you might as well expect to convince a hungry boy that if he prays for bread he will be no longer hungry, as to expect that teaching the spiritual laws of a man's being will enable him to manage and control his physical tendencies, without any instruction as to the physical laws of his higher nature, and their relation to and interdependence upon each other.

"The Catholic Church is greatly in advance of our Protestant churches in this respect, in that they preach from the pulpit, and teach at confessional practical common sense upon these subjects, besides having printed questions bearing upon the same matter for each day's private confessional with one's own soul."

"My dear Marion," I said, "you are talking in riddles: what do you mean by the physical laws of a man's higher nature?"

I was getting interested, as indeed I always was in this earnest woman, my well beloved wife.

"I mean the laws of sex, Hugh," she answered;

"the most important laws of life ; because they are the vital foundation of every person's happiness and usefulness."

"But, Marion," I said, "public opinion teaches that these laws are of man's lower nature."

"I know they do, Hugh," she seriously answered, "and in that they make a grave mistake. It is because it would be a revolution against public opinion to right this wrong, even in one's own family, that I must know whether I can have your entire sympathy and support."

I hesitated before replying.

"Marion, the wheel of progress has carried you so far in advance of the general thought in this matter, that I do not know how to keep pace with you."

"May I infer from that, Hugh, that you will sustain me in my plan of education?"

"Certainly, my Marion," I answered ; "you have evidently made a study of many questions that are still Greek to me, and it will be some time yet before our boy will leave the side of his mother. I can trust you, my love."

"Thank you, Hugh," she responded with a grateful look ; "that is as it should be ; it is the mother who should understand and make a study of the laws of life. No greater wrong exists in society than the assumption that a woman should know nothing about the laws of her being until she is married (which is a fallacy entertained by some), and must learn them then from a husband who has gathered from very questionable sources the little that he

knows. It is the wife who should bring to the marriage altar a knowledge of the relations of life, and teach them to the husband, from the sacred point of view of a woman's religious nature."

"I think you are right, as you always are," I said. "If all women were like you there would be less unhappiness in married life, from ignorance and misconception of the marital bond. But to return to our subject. You know the world at large regards what you call the 'law of nature' as that which we have in connection with the brute creation, hence belonging to our lower nature."

Marion smiled, and said, —

"Hugh, suppose we draw our parallel the other way, and say in that the brute resembles man, who is guided by intellect and reason, and is thus raised to a higher plane by that resemblance, rather than acknowledge that we have been brought down to his level. We receive our common instincts alike from God, but man has the higher gift of intellect, and so should consecrate his soul and body, and their uses, to the high purposes of the elevation of the human race and the enlightenment of the home.

"When man compares himself to the brute creation he descends to sensuality, which is as abnormal and unmanly in a human being as the natural laws are God-given and manly."

"The laws of sex, and the tendency to sensuality, I have always regarded as one and the same, while you treat them as separate conditions. I suppose this must be owing to my lack of that knowledge with which you propose to endow our children; but

I think you will have to enlighten me as to these fine distinctions of yours before I can be of much service to you in instructing others," I said with a smile.

"Your mistake in this is a very common one," she answered; "you have sailed along on the popular wave, without thinking much about it; but if you stop to think, you will readily see that the sensualist seeks only self-gratification, which leads to degradation and wretchedness, while the laws of life seek mutual happiness, and are the foundation of the highest type of love that God ever ordained for humanity — that of husband and wife."

"Very good, Marion," said I; "but I think the mothers of the land would take issue with you on that assertion, and claim that the mother-love surpassed it in degree and in God-given power."

"I would grant their conclusion, Hugh," she said, but my premises are right nevertheless. The mother-love is the direct offspring of the wife-love — it is the consummation of true marriage."

"I have no doubt, Marion, that you are right, and that your theories put in practice would make the world better; but how are you going to accomplish this with children?"

She replied in a tone of decision, as if she had thought it all out, —

"By teaching children all through their childhood the laws of their body as scrupulously as we now teach them the laws of propriety, answering all their questions truthfully, and from the sacred vantage-ground of a pure home, instead of leaving them to learn from the tongue of vice life's uses, or depend-

ing upon the slang of the street for the solution of life's most mysterious problems.

"I tell you, Hugh, many a boy's life has been hopelessly wrecked on this hidden rock of a parent's false delicacy. I would teach my boys that love, marriage, and fatherhood are sacred duties, and that lives of purity are the necessary preparation for the fulfilment of these most holy sacraments. I would teach my girls that true marriage furnishes for every pain and every trial full compensation, in the divinest happiness given to mortals by a beneficent Creator. Have I not proved it so?" she said, looking into my eyes with hers shining like stars.

"Marion," I said, laughing, "you are only a novice in married life; our honeymoon has not begun to wane yet."

"It never will," she answered quickly, "until the grave closes over one of us."

"Are you done moralizing?" I asked jestingly.

"Pretty nearly;" then, with a movement to rise, "are you tired? Should you like me to sit in a chair?"

My only answer was to draw my arm more closely about her, and say, —

"Go on: what more would you do?"

"I would teach my boys and girls that a marriage in name and not in fact renders the sacred and beautiful rites of marriage unspeakably repulsive, robs married life of all its compensations, and makes the sacred natal hour one of sorrow and regret."

Marion had become so thoroughly imbued with her subject, that she seemed more a creature of

heaven than of earth. I looked upon her with speechless admiration. It seemed to me as if the heavens had opened and poured upon me a perfect flood of light, affording a new solution of the problem of human life.

I pressed her to my heart, and asked her if she did not repent now of telling me once that she could not trust me.

She only answered by laying her dear arms around my neck and covering my face with kisses.

I know what it is to be supremely trusted, to live thought to thought and soul to soul with the object of my soul's worship. Life is all one broad sunshine, which must go on shining brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.

"Ignorance is the mother of vice and crime, knowledge the promoter of virtue and happiness."

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